

LONDON SOCIETY.

JANUARY 1892.

The Countess Pharamond.

(A SEQUEL TO "SHEBA.")

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CHAPTER I.

MADAME LA COMTESSE "RECEIVES."

BEHIND the gilded gates of the Hôtel Pharamond, in the Champs Elysées, the world of Paris was being entertained.

For some years the *hôtel* had been closed to society. Its owner had been travelling far and wide, visiting old world and new, intent on amusement and distraction.

Rumour whispered that even his great wealth had not been proof against the vicissitudes of the gaming-table or the extravagances of a certain "*lionne*," well known in theatrical circles—a queen of comedy, and a queen possessed of an ambition to shine in a very dazzling and eccentric fashion. To escape her thralldom, which threatened to overstep his patience and his resources, the Count Pharamond took himself off abruptly to safer, if less civilized, regions. This had all happened some years ago, and now Count Pharamond had returned to his beloved boulevards—returned enriched by a new fortune to which he had unexpectedly succeeded, and accompanied—to the no small curiosity of society—by a wife, whom he had met and married at the Antipodes.

These events had been duly circulated in fashionable journals, and discussed by the count's former acquaintances, previous to the advent of the Countess Pharamond herself.

To-night she was "receiving," for the first time, that select and critical circle to which her husband's rank admitted her—and with sinking heart, but unquailing courage, she stood by his side in the first of her brilliant suite of reception rooms, undergoing that most terrible ordeal a woman can undergo—the merciless criticism of her own sex.

The countess was a beautiful woman—of that there could be no doubt. Tall and finely formed, with every adjunct of toilet and art to enhance the advantages of youth and nature, she need not have feared any adverse verdict on her personal charms. She was very fair; her golden hair, the colour of ripe corn, gave warmth to her faultless skin; her eyes, of somewhat too cold a blue, were shaded by lashes judiciously darkened. Her full Junoesque figure was displayed according to the irrational decrees of fashion; that is to say, most of the costly satin that formed her gown trailed on the floor, and the upper portion of her body made up in diamonds for what it missed in material covering. The effect was no doubt pleasing to herself, and satisfactory to her husband, who had pronounced her toilette of a "*chic incomparable*." A critical and artistic mind might have objected to it; but fashion is a goddess more eccentric than artistic, and a woman who is dressed "just like other women" may be sure she is safe.

The scene was very brilliant, and the magnificent *salons* lent themselves as an admirable foreground to the beauty and jewels that filled them. People who had expected to meet other people met them, and were satisfied and complaisant in consequence; for, strangely enough, one's host and hostess are usually the last persons one is interested in or cares to see in any great social gathering.

The reasons for entertaining must afford a curious problem to thoughtful minds. Is it to spend a great deal of money on people who don't even mean "thank you" for your trouble? Is it to outshine others, or to display one's own possessions, or effect a temporary sensation, or get noticed in society journals, or rid oneself of superfluous wealth, or from a sense of pleasure, or duty?

I am inclined to think very little personal enjoyment is to be found in it, and very little recompense for the trouble and expense, and waste and extravagance it entails.

In the rush and hurry of modern life the art of entertaining has both suffered and deteriorated. France kept it longer and understood it better than any other nation ; but even the Parisian *salon* is not what it was before the Revolution, and with the decadence of the old *noblesse* one can also trace the decadence of that charming and brilliant society where wit and beauty and culture reigned supreme, and held their special courts, and were adored by their special courtiers.

Now we have wealth and bought titles—the vulgarity of trade successes—the evanescent triumph of beauty pushed into notoriety by a “personage,” and trumpeted loudly by society journals. We have crowded gatherings, where the mere fact of standing on a staircase represents enjoyment—huge crushes, where health, nerves and temper alike suffer, and whose martyrdom is duly atoned for by a line in a newspaper, where chance may kindly bracket American shoddyism beside an aristocratic title.

There is no doubt that society has struck a false note, but the vibration endures long, and the few trained and tutored ears are the only ears that really suffer. Where there are so many jarring discords, so much that is false and inharmonious, one ceases to criticize out of sheer disgust at the hopelessness of the task.

However, the miscellaneous crowd passing and re-passing through the magnificent *salons* of the Hôtel Pharamond seemed very well satisfied with their entertainment. Curiosity was rife about their hostess—the “Cornflower of Australia” some one had named her, and the *sobriquet* charmed the men and amused the women. In reality, she was not Australian at all, being of English birth and descent ; but as Count Pharamond had met her in Australia, Paris thought fit to dower her somewhat uncommon beauty with a corresponding origin. “He bears it well, *ce rôle de mari*, our dear Pharamond,” said the somewhat *passé* Duchesse de Valette to her friend and contemporary, Madame de Mauprât, as they sat side by side in one of the less crowded *salons*, criticizing and scandalizing their dearest friends in approved fashion.

“He does not look especially happy,” returned Blanche de Mauprât, who was a faded blonde of a somewhat sceptical and cynical temperament. “I wonder why he married her—he might have done so much better.”

“He did not need,” said the duchesse. “He has birth and

fortune. He always said he would please himself whenever he did marry."

"She is not '*vrai aristocrate*.' There is something crude, nervous, uncertain about her," answered Madame de Mauprât, signalling with her fan to a man who was lazily sauntering through the room. "Here is Léon Bérarde—let us ask his opinion about her."

"Who is that handsome man he is speaking to?" inquired the duchesse curiously. "I do not remember his face; he has the *air anglais*. Ah, Monsieur Bérarde," she added presently, "why did you not present your friend? He is a stranger to me. I do not remember seeing him before in Paris."

"He is only passing through on his way to Germany, madame," said Léon Bérarde, as he saluted Madame de Mauprât with graceful *empressement*. "He is an English earl—of great fortune. He has done me the honour to buy my picture, 'The Psyche,' exhibited at the last *Salon*."

"He is very handsome, but what a melancholy face," said the duchesse reflectively; "one would say something tragic had happened in his life. Bring him here, Léon. I should like to speak to him."

Monsieur Bérarde bowed, and left them to search for the Englishman, who had wandered on by himself—one of a crowd in whom he felt very little interest. When his French acquaintance found him he was just on the point of leaving, but Léon Bérarde persuaded him that the two ladies who desired his acquaintance were both charming and aristocratic, and he allowed himself to be conducted to their presence.

Already a little crowd was fluttering around the Duchesse de Valette, for she was a well-known personage and very popular in society, but one and all made way for the tall handsome Englishman with the grave face and sad deep eyes, on whom the capricious fancy of Madame de Valette had fallen for the moment.

He spoke French more carefully than fluently, but the duchesse could talk for a dozen people, and exerted herself to be specially brilliant and entertaining.

"As you have been so short a time in Paris," she said at last, "I presume you have not seen our hostess before to-night."

"I am ashamed to say that I have not seen her, even to-night,"

he answered. "Monsieur Bérarde dined with me and then insisted on my accompanying him here for an hour, but I had not the curiosity to ask the name of my hostess, nor have I yet discovered her."

The duchesse laughed. "That is so like an Englishman," she said. "I wonder what makes you so cold and indifferent. Would it be all the same had you found yourself in a *salon* of the Faubourg, or that of some *demi-monde* celebrity; at Monsieur Thiers', or Monsieur Zola's?"

"I am afraid," he said with that grave smile which had no mirth in it, "that it would not have concerned me very much in which of those places I had found myself. As it is, perhaps you will kindly take pity on my ignorance and enlighten me."

"Willingly," she said; "but first give me your arm and take me to the refreshment rooms, and on our way there I will give you the history of my friend, your unknown host, and of the Australian beauty he has married and brought to Paris to startle it with novelty as he has so often done before."

She had risen and taken the arm presented to her, but she suddenly felt it tremble, and looking up saw her companion's face had turned very pale. "I—I beg your pardon, madame," he stammered huskily; "but you said Australian, did you not?"

"But certainly, monsieur—the lady has come from there. My friend Count Pharamond——"

"Pharamond — Good God!" He dropped her arm; he seemed for a moment to forget her presence, or where he was.

The duchesse stared at him in veritable consternation.

"*Mais—qu'est-ce que c'est ?* What have we then—what have I said?" she murmured in astonishment.

With a strong effort he recovered his composure. "A thousand pardons, madame," he said, "but your announcement came as a—as indeed a surprise. I—I knew a Count Pharamond in Australia. I myself have come from there but a year ago. Can it possibly be the same?"

"Sit down a moment, you are agitated and disturbed," said the duchesse with ready tact. She was really concerned at the pallor and agitation of this interesting stranger, and the sensation of a new *petite histoire*, or *chronique scandaleuse*, was sweet to her jaded tastes. "Later we will seek the refreshment rooms. Tell me—I am much interested—the Count Pharamond is a very old

friend of mine—you knew him in the colonies and you knew his wife also. Is it so?"

"I did not know his wife—personally . . . and my acquaintance with the count was very slight."

The duchesse noted the constraint in the voice, the sudden coldness and hauteur of the handsome face, but she did not see the lines of pain round the firm lips that the thick moustache concealed. She did not guess that every nerve and fibre of that strong frame was quivering with the agony of a suddenly awakened memory.

Her face clouded. It was disappointing to be able to learn nothing after all. She did not care what her new acquaintance knew of the Count Pharamond, but she did care very much for any information respecting his wife. "The countess is very beautiful," she said presently. She wondered whether this man was trying to baffle her; whether he might not have had some *tendresse* for this Australian Juno.

"Is she?" he answered vaguely and with an indifference that was too real to be assumed, though the duchesse chose to think it so. His thoughts had travelled far enough away, seeing only blue sky and burning sunlight, and the foliage of giant trees where the whirr of the locusts sounded, and the gold of fruit on the orange boughs, and the starry glow of the passion flower, and amidst all, and through a haze of something sadder than any tears there looked back to his one sad girl's face, with eyes whose innocent dreams were drowned in the sorrows of womanhood, and lips whose kisses were sealed for ever now by the silent touch of death.

And amidst the sudden darkness that swept over his senses, and made the rooms and the lights and the gay laughing throng as things that had no meaning, a voice reached his ear in the shrill penetrating French accent that seemed to probe like a knife his tired and overwrought brain.

"Ah, there! monsieur; that is she—our hostess—the new beauty—the Flower of Australia as they call her. Tell me what you think . . . perhaps you are mistaken—you did know her. Is it so?"

Stupidly, vaguely, he looked where she directed, and saw coming through the suite of rooms beyond, a woman all in gleaming white satin, and with the blaze and glitter of diamonds

on her white skin and the gold of her corn-coloured hair. He rose to his feet. By right of his grand stature and proportions he towered over the puny Frenchmen around. The eyes of the Countess Pharamond fell upon him, and rested lingeringly, doubtfully, as she advanced nearer and nearer. Was it a long or short time? He never knew. He never in any after hour could have told. But she was beside him, before him, her hand outstretched in a timid and hesitating greeting.

"It is so long since I have seen you," she said in his own tongue, "but I am sure I am not mistaken. I am sure I remember you in—Sydney. You are Paul Meredith?"

"I was—Paul Meredith, Madame Pharamond," he said, bowing low over the outstretched hands. "I am so no longer, only it seems as hard to believe it as——"

"As that I was ever Bessie Saxton," she answered. And it seemed that the history of a lifetime spoke to each in the swift glance of meeting eyes.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE THE WORLD.

"AND so you are not Paul Meredith any longer?" said the Countess Pharamond later on that same evening.

The Earl of Amersley had been at last released from the somewhat *exigeante* demands of Madame de Valette, and his hostess had watched her opportunity and now detained him by her side in that solitude which a crowd can always command.

"No," he answered, speaking English as she had done. "The change of fortune was very sudden and unexpected. Death removed my two brothers and then my father. I returned to England only just in time to see him."

"And will you ever go back to Sydney?" she asked, sinking her voice to a lower and more sympathetic key.

She noted the spasm of pain that contracted his face. She knew nothing of his history, or of what had happened since that time when—to her—he had been only a singer and the hero of a romantic love story, in which the friend of her girlhood's days had played a part.

"No," he said in answer to her question; "I never wish to go there again."

"I wish," she said somewhat nervously, "you would tell me of . . . of Sheba Ormatroyd. I have so often wanted to know. I have heard nothing of her since . . . since my marriage."

His face grew white as death. "You . . . you don't know" —he said brokenly—"you never heard she . . . died?"

"Died," faltered Madame Pharamond, "out there in Australia? No, I never heard of it. Poor Sheba, what a strange life—and how short."

"We will not speak of her," said Paul abruptly. "It is very painful to me. Tell me rather of yourself. I little thought, when I accepted Bérarde's invitation to-night, that I should find myself in the house of an old acquaintance."

"The world is very small," said Madame Pharamond, with the air of one making an original observation; "and you and I ought to have been friends, even though we were not. But no doubt your wife often spoke of me. By-the-bye, how bitter her people were against you both. What a pity they did not know who you really were."

Lord Amersley winced at the observation. It showed a want of tact and delicacy. He made no answer, and his companion rattled on in a manner she considered entertaining, telling him of her life in Paris, her *château* where she had spent the autumn, her delight in the gay and brilliant city, and her determination to be a "success" in society.

"I am getting quite used to French ways and French people," she said, in somewhat the old boastful way that used to annoy Sheba Ormatroyd. "The married women here have far the best of it. I managed to pick up the language very quickly. My husband says I am very 'adaptable.' He was very tiresome at first. We used to quarrel dreadfully, but now we get on very well; as well as most married couples, at all events. Fortunately for me, I was never romantic like Sheba."

"That must be a decided advantage," said Lord Amersley gravely. "I believe French marriages are not, as a rule, based on anything so unstable as romance."

"No, they are always arranged by parents and relatives. I think it is a good plan; most of the marriages in England are so shamefully improvident; and, after all, in a few years' time they don't turn out any better than ours. If I ever have a daughter, I shall certainly bring her upon French principles. By the way,

I suppose you do not know I have a little son. He is staying with his grandmother at the *château*. She adores him. That is just as well. I hate children myself. I think they are an unmitigated nuisance."

The grave eyes of the Englishman looked down at her with something of contempt.

"I am sorry to hear any woman say that," he said. "I know we live in an age when maternity is considered an unpleasant obligation, instead of a sacred relationship; it is the fashion to say so, even if one does not think it."

"The *voix de la nature* does not speak to everybody," said Madame Pharamond, with a shrug of her graceful shoulders. "It certainly has had nothing to say to me—or to Pharamond either, for that matter. He was pleased to have an heir—when one has property, of course it is better—but really, I think the old countess was the person most interested in the affair. By the way, do you know my husband?"

"I have not that honour," he answered stiffly, with a vivid remembrance of certain incidents in the count's life in the colonies that were not exactly to his credit.

"Oh! I must introduce you, then," she said, looking round the room.

"Pray do not trouble," said Lord Amersley hastily. "I am just about to leave."

"But you are staying in Paris? you will call again?" she entreated eagerly.

"I should be delighted, only I leave to-morrow for Germany; I am only passing through Paris."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the countess with real regret. She had looked forward to seeing a great deal more of this handsome and distinguished man. "Must you go to-morrow?" she added persuasively. "Could you not put off the journey for a day, and come and dine with us? We have a box at the Odéon for the evening. Let me offer you a seat."

He shook his head. "You are very good, countess; but I cannot remain in Paris. An old friend of mine is at Heidelberg—ill, and I have promised to go to him. It has been an unexpected pleasure, this meeting. But no doubt I shall see you again, here or in London. Do you ever go to London?"

"We are going for a couple of months this season," she

answered. He saw her face flush; her manner grew nervous and constrained. He wondered what was the reason. Following her glance, he saw that it had travelled to the further end of the *salon*, where her husband was standing talking to a group of women.

It struck him, as he noted the dark coarse face and coldly gleaming eyes of Pharamond, that there was something threatening in his aspect, and that his wife was afraid of him. The look soon passed away. The countess had learnt the lessons of the world well enough to master her face and feelings. But none knew better than herself how little need the veriest beggar in the street had to envy her, for all her wealth and beauty, or the position in society that was her portion.

She hated her husband, but she feared him even more than she hated him. Ostensibly the mistress of his splendid homes, she knew that his flagrant infidelities, his coarse sneers, his dishonouring suspicions of herself, had made life a burden to her.

The look that had flashed across the room but a moment before told her in plain language that her long and earnest conversation with her handsome guest had not been unnoticed, and would probably be the signal for a domestic storm when she and Pharamond were alone. Yet, with something of the bravado and devilry that shared largely in the innate coquetry of her disposition, she did not affect less interest in the conversation and companionship of Lord Amersley. Rather did she endeavour to keep him by her side a little longer, talking with eagerness and animation—flashing smiles and glances at the grave and somewhat pre-occupied face. He did not like her, or her manner. Indifferent as most women were to him, she had the power of raising something of irritation and impatience from those cold ashes of indifference. She was a beautiful woman—and, in a way, a clever one—but in the mind of Amersley, as in the mind of Paul Meredith, there rankled the sting of past memories, and her association with those memories made her every word and gesture distasteful.

He longed to get away from this glow of light and jewels—from the scents of the hot-house flowers, perishing in the gas-heated atmosphere—from the babble of tongues and laughter and compliments, that bore—for him—so patent a stamp of insincerity.

"I never was fit for society," he thought. "But now—now I

loathe it!" And all the scene grew dim before his eyes, and the sudden ache of a memory never stifled woke again in his heart. What were the empty honours, the vast rent-roll, the homage of the world to him now? Nothing—and less than nothing, he told himself in the bitterness of a sorrow that made death seem enviable.

Would he not have given each and all of these only for the free wild life of the bush—the sound of one voice, with its glad welcome—the sight of eyes dark with love and tender with passion that once had hidden their tell-tale adoration on his breast? Ay, that he would—a thousand and a thousand fold!

One life—one little human life—to centre all that means the world!

Truly, love is the cruellest and the most unwise dream that ever made the sport of gods, the laughter of men, and—perhaps the tears of angels.

He thought this even as he listened to the Countess Pharamond's banal chatter—answering at random here and there when she paused for comment, or question. But he was thankful when he at last succeeded in getting away—thankful to be alone in the quiet streets, and under the quiet stars. Alone, with his own pain and his own sorrow; that sorrow which remorse had sharpened into undying regret, whose veiled face bore the impress of a sin that tears of blood could never wash away.

"Ah, God! How lightly we sin in youth; how vainly we repent in manhood," he thought in his heart.

The old passion welled up keen and fresh as of yesterday, the love for a woman—wooed—won—betrayed—murdered—so he cried in self-accusation—in that brief bygone youth that had only known for itself one short happy year.

His restless feverish steps had taken him somewhat out of his route. He found himself on one of the many bridges of the Seine; the dull water flowing silently at his feet; above, the million gleaming points of starlight. He gazed into those dark and silent depths, and one long shuddering sigh escaped his lips.

Would death give her back to him? Was there—as poets sang and fabled, and priests vaguely taught—some fair and unknown land where soul might be once more in touch with soul, and love, consecrated and purified in fires of suffering, might sigh itself to rest in satisfied content?

And again and again, as in old days of darkness and trouble and perplexity, the strong man's soul was rent within him, and the cry, vain as all earth's sorrowful cries must ever seem, rang wildly out in the silence: "Oh, for certainty! For conviction! For truth!"

But the stars shone on. The water flowed. The soft hush and peace of night held all the dusky city in its thrall. Other answer there was none. Other answer there never would be—so it seemed to him!

CHAPTER III.

CONJUGAL BLISS.

THE COUNTESS PHARAMOND was sitting alone in her luxurious dressing-room gazing into the fire. Her maid had removed her ball dress and jewels. She was wrapped in a soft gown of white cashmere and lace; her corn-coloured hair, not being long or luxuriant enough for the usual "heroine-like" fashion described in novels as "flowing to her feet," was carelessly knotted at the back of her head. She held a novel in her hand, but she was not reading it. Her eyes had a somewhat strained and anxious look, as they turned ever and again to the door which separated her apartments from those of her husband.

It opened at last, and he came in—a cigar between his teeth—his eyes dull and gloomy—his coarse figure and slouching gait looking decidedly out of place amidst the satin and lace draperies, and dainty upholstery that made the room so essentially feminine.

His glance fell on the figure lying back so gracefully on the *chaise longue*. That at least was no blur amidst the delicate and costly surroundings, and though he did not love, and never had loved, his wife, he felt a thrill of sultan's pride in his ownership as he met the somewhat timid glance of her blue eyes.

He ruled her despotically and she feared him. Of that last fact he was sure, and he deemed it the best mode of managing a woman, thereby showing how little he knew them. Tyranny only leads to deception, and deception to infidelity, but Pharamond had long ago made up his mind that his wife should give him no trouble in *that* line.

She hated him to smoke in her room, but to-night she made no remark on the offence. She was somewhat anxious to know if her *début* in Parisian society, as his wife, had been satisfactory;

and she awaited his first remark with much greater dread than he was aware of.

He stood before her; his bold and critical eyes wandered over her figure with that insolent and possessive glance that she so hated.

"You did very well," he said at last, removing his cigar and puffing a cloud of smoke up to the painted ceiling; "you were a novelty. Paris loves novelty. You are not at all a *grande dame*, but you are *chic*. Perhaps that is better. I am glad you have altered your hair. The deep colour suits your skin. You did not rouge?—No. Célestine says you will not need to do that for a year or two—she is artist enough to know. You may safely leave yourself in her hands."

The hot colour flushed his wife's face. Her lips curled. "I am glad," she said coldly, "that you were satisfied. Célestine certainly ought to know your tastes."

He laughed. It always pleased him when he angered her. "Yes," he said coolly, "I think she does. But do not be jealous, my dear; that is an affair of the past."

"I should scarcely be jealous of my waiting-maid," she answered with indifference—"or of the Duchesse de Valette either," she added as an after-thought.

"Ah, poor Hélène," he murmured with affected sympathy. "And once we called her '*la belle Hélène*.' She was the beauty of Paris. By the way, who was your English friend? I seemed to know his face."

She had been expecting that question and was prepared for it.

"The Englishman whom Bérarde brought," she said. "I thought you would remember him. He is now the Earl of Amersley. He was Paul Meredith, the opera singer, who was in Sydney."

Pharamond took his cigar from his lips and stared at her in undisguised astonishment. "Paul Meredith," he muttered. "He—an English earl."

"We always thought there was a mystery about him," said his wife languidly. "He told me his two brothers died suddenly. His father was very old, and the shock killed him. Paul succeeded to the title and estates. He must be enormously rich."

"And where is his wife?" asked Pharamond abruptly.

"Dead—she died out there. He gave no particulars. I think he was really in love with her. I must say I never could understand what any man could find attractive in Sheba Ormatroyd."

She certainly was not pretty; she had the most brusque, disagreeable manners, and the most complete want of tact. She was clever, certainly, but I thought men did not care about clever women."

That cold evil look she had learned to dread crept like a dark shadow over Pharamond's face. "Pretty," he said slowly. "No, she was not—pretty. I suppose one would have called you *that*. But she was beautiful; she would have been a grand woman, a woman a man might have been proud to love, prouder still to win."

"Oh, I know you had a romantic fancy for her yourself," sneered the countess. "And I suppose her memory wears a sort of halo for you, because she was just the one woman who would have nothing to say to you. Your adoration and attentions were certainly thrown away on her."

A frown darkened his brow. "She knew the value of womanhood," he said, "and how to command a man's esteem. In that respect she did not resemble most of her sex."

The countess coloured to the roots of her soft, fair hair. "Perhaps she was not tempted," she said hotly. "It is scarcely fair, Maxime, to reproach me with the weakness that you always profess to admire as the greatest of feminine charms."

"I am not reproaching," he said. "I suppose I ought to consider myself the gainer."

Then he laughed brutally. "All the same, one knows that a woman won as you were won, *ma chère*, is not of the type whom one trusts very far, or respects very highly. But, as I have before warned you, I am not of the *complaisant* French husband order. If I have risked my honour in placing it in your hands, I shall know how to preserve, or avenge it."

She shivered as she sat there in the warm firelight, and her face grew very pale. Again and again had that rod been held over her. Again and again had she been forced to feel that her girlhood's error made the penance of her womanhood.

The man who had been trapped into marrying her, seldom lost an opportunity of bringing that fact to her recollection. He himself scoffed at the moral obligations of marriage as far as they concerned men, but he rigorously upheld them to the woman who bore his name, and was the mother of his heir.

"You might be generous enough to spare me these constant suspicions, Maxime," she said at last. "At least my conduct

shows blamelessly enough before the history and morals of your friend, the Duchesse de Valette."

He made a gesture of contempt. "She," he said, "is not my wife. Whatever other women are, whatever I am myself, I do not choose that the breath of scandal shall touch the Countess Pharamond."

She was silent. A sigh of fatigue escaped her. Her eyes beneath their drooping lids were somewhat dim and sad. But Bessie Saxton had not been of the type of woman who shed tears easily. The Countess Pharamond was still less so.

The count noted the signs of fatigue and tossed his burnt-out cigar into the flames. "I suppose you are tired and want to rest," he said. "You must not lessen the impression you have made when you appear in the Bois to-morrow. Well, good-night, *mon amie. Bien dormez !*"

He brushed her cheek with his lips lightly and carelessly, and then sauntered off. At the door he paused a moment and looked back.

"I have one thing to say," he said slowly. "I do not like your English friend. Nor do I desire his further acquaintance. I leave you to convey to him that fact."

Then, still with that cold smile on his lips, he went away, leaving her to solitude and her own thoughts.

* * * *

Tired and wearied as she was the Countess Pharamond sat there for long after her husband had left, going over and over again in her own mind the scenes and memories so vividly recalled to-night.

Her ambitions had been satisfied, the desires of her youth and girlhood accomplished and fulfilled beyond her utmost expectations. She had wealth and honours, and social success and beauty; she was still young and had still the capacity of enjoyment. Could she not be happy? Had not fortune been kind to her?

She wondered at the dull hopeless feeling that alone usurped her heart to-night.

In what respect had womanhood altered her? Why should she now feel that even gratified ambition and granted wishes were as unstable and as unsatisfactory as the vague dreams of youth, that had glorified their possible attainment?

She could not answer the question. She thought almost regretfully of her girlhood's friend, of the strange, restless, searching soul that had at last found rest. "She at least kept the love she believed in," she thought. "How she worshipped that man. I wonder if he remembers her now . . . Poor Sheba."

She sighed, and rose from her chair at last, catching sight, as she did so, of her own reflection in the glass beyond.

"I was only a mere pretty girl," she thought, "when I won what I had determined to win. I am a woman now—a handsome woman—if the world's verdict means anything. I wonder what woke up in me to-night? I am afraid, myself, of the hate I feel for Pharamond. If I dared—revenge——"

The thought coiled asp-like about her heart, stinging to fierce and living pain the bitter and humiliated feelings that rankled there.

"It would be easy enough," she thought. "But after all a vengeance that recoils on oneself is a very useless thing, and I think, sometimes, he is evil enough for even murder. Why did he say that about Amersley? Is he jealous of him? Can it be possible that he still remembers that girl and looks on Paul as his rival? Paul—" She smiled softly as she threw off the cashmere and lace from her beautiful figure. "I never envied Sheba anything, but I do envy her that one man's love . . . I think I would give a great deal to know if he still—remembers."

Then she left the dressing-room for the adjoining bed-chamber, and tried to find in sleep the only peace that ever came to her now.

Perhaps she was less heartless than she had imagined. Perhaps the new ties of wifehood and maternity had roused in her nature the consciousness of some want denied, some tenderness forfeited.

Society has settled most things to its satisfaction, but even society has not been clever enough to kill out all human feeling in human nature.

The Countess Pharamond had ever ridiculed the possibility of affection interfering with worldly advantages. Perhaps she had yet to acknowledge that error, and reap its fruits. Her temperament was naturally cold and selfish, and in the hands of the man she had married it was deteriorating daily. Fear made her a coward. Dislike made her a hypocrite. The tyranny that enforces obedience in a woman is a weapon whose danger she

can generally manage to evade, and with all the strength of her nature the wife of Pharamond had grown to hate the brutal tyrant who posed to the world as an admirable husband; who left her in her youth and beauty to console himself with viler charms, and more equivocal society.

But in the brief years of marriage she had never hated him as she did to-night. For to-night she felt that consolation might be possible—sympathy might be won—and that even her own shame and regret might bear less poignant a sting if the grave sad eyes of Paul Meredith would only from time to time look back at her own, or she might feel that in his strong manhood there lived the promise and possibility of a friendship as strong and noble.

Tired and fevered, and impatient, so she lay for long wakeful hours, forgetful of her recent triumph, forgetful of the place she had won and must fill now in the ranks of that world whose notice she had once so eagerly coveted.

With the noon of the already risen day she would have to rise and smile, and play her part again; but in the solitude and darkness of the grey dawn her wide, and sleepless eyes saw only the ghosts of the past stealing shadow-like through the mists of memory—saw only a tired and miserable and discontented woman, whom the world envied as the Countess Pharamond.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD FRIENDS AND OLD SORROWS.

"I AM getting old," said Franz Müller, taking his pipe from his lips and looking at it regretfully. "I no longer enjoy my smoke. I feel pains and fatigue instead of throwing them off. I do not so much love solitude. I grow impatient with the students who disagree with me, and the professors who have stagnated here in the old University until they seem as stony and immovable as itself. I find my bed hard, and my food indigestible. The laughter and anecdotes, the fights and frolics of the students seem but the folly of witless fools. And once I thought it an ideal life!"

His glance wandered round his room, a very simply-furnished room in the Langestrassé at Heidelberg, and in so wandering found itself suddenly arrested by another glance that met it, a

glance that looked out from a rough tangled mass of grey hair. It was only the reflection of his own face given back from one of those delectable German mirrors, which would shame the loveliest complexion and distort the most perfect features.

Müller recognized himself, and a faint smile came to his lips.

"So," he said half aloud, "so, my friend, we are growing old, you and I. All our wisdom and all our philosophy will not alter that fact. Well, life has never been too kind to us, nor friends too many, nor love too sweet. We can afford to part with it less regretfully than most folk. Will its problems vex no more? or are they to pursue us like an unsolved equation on the next journey? Who shall say? . . . ay, who shall say?"

The shadows were deepening in the quiet room, the smoke of the big pipe curled like a faint grey cloud to the white ceiling. The old man leaned back in his chair, and let his mind wander to the past. It had been eventful enough, but it had only left behind a longing for rest and peace; that weariness of mind and body which sooner or later overtakes humanity, lessening its desires almost to the limits of childhood. A little food, a little sleep, a little peace, that made up the sum of desire now. Then one day the sleep would be a little longer, the peace a little deeper, and—well, that would be all, so far as the world need concern itself. He would not be remembered long. He had done nothing very great or wonderful. His music had never been popular, his writings were too abstruse or too speculative to please the general taste. He sighed as he thought of all his studies in philosophy and science. What did they represent? Misleading theories, contradictory speculations. He himself was as little satisfied as those he had instructed. Did not all the most puzzling questions of life resolve themselves into the one answer—death; and beyond that what was sure? what could the mind grasp and the soul seize with absolute certainty?

From time to time a wave of spiritual enlightenment had passed over the world, but it was very little better for the teaching of saints, or the death of martyrs. The so-called virtues of civilization had degenerated into vices, from which the untutored savage, obeying simply the laws of nature and his own instincts, would shrink in disgust. Men were not less criminal, sectarians not less hypocritical, scientists not less bigoted, the world not less immoral than they had all been in the early days of the Founder

of Christianity. If a tree is to be judged by its fruits, a religion by its results, truly there was not much to boast of since that Founder had left to the world the legacy of his teachings, and example.

Müller had always been bitter against creeds, and the professors of creeds; but now, with the weariness of a useless antagonism, he acknowledged that without some sort of faith, some definite hope, something to cling to and uphold, the world might have been even worse than it was. You cannot individualize, you cannot even reach the great mass of humanity, and so teach, and so lead, and so guide it, that all minds become as one.

Sooner or later the greatest enthusiasm grows weary with the hopelessness of such a task. Periods of darkness are surrounded by periods of light, but the darkness rolls back. The feeble burst of spirituality gives place again to gross materialism; the hope of success fades away; and prejudice and ignorance again usurp the place which had seemed to yield to the sway of Wisdom, and the promise of Truth.

Somewhat in this vein had his reflections run when a knock at the door roused him.

The German handmaid appeared with lights, and the information that a gentleman wished to see him. Imagining it was one of the professors or students who often looked in to spend an hour with him in the evenings, Müller bade her show the gentleman in. But when his eyes fell on the tall figure and well-cut clothes he started up from his chair.

"*Gott in Himmel!* Paul—you! Ah, my friend, this is good, indeed. But how came you here? What brought you? Sit down; sit down. We'll have some Niersteiner and a good talk. It is long—ah! too long since we met."

"I come direct from Paris," said Paul, smiling at the old man's enthusiasm. "You said you were ill, Müller, and I thought you were probably neglecting yourself—feeding your mind and forgetting your body, as you have a trick of doing. I am an idle man, you know. I thought a run over here would not harm me, and—well, here I am."

He stood there, so tall and strong, with the old man's hands grasped in his own, looking down with grave and kindly eyes at the familiar face of his old friend.

He noted the change that illness and age had wrought, and it hurt him to see it. His was not the nature that makes many friends, but rather of the kind that clings most faithfully to one or two in the passage through life. Müller's eyes grew somewhat dim, but as emotion was not compatible with philosophy, he dropped Paul's hands, and bustled about the room, producing a long-necked flask of Rhine wine and some glasses from an adjacent cupboard, and setting them on the table near the window, while all the time he talked and jested to Paul in the old dry, humorous way.

"Ill—yes, I have been ill ; but what would you, then ? Seventy years is a burden one is bound to feel even in an age of sanitation. But in *that* the Fatherland does not excel. They give one good beer here, Paul, but pay not much attention to water and drains. I am not what you call—acclimatized, so I had the fever. It has left me weak—that is all—and I discover that I am old, Paul—really old ; the frame and the mind, and the heart and the brain, getting a little tired of the harness. *Ach !* my friend, but it is good to see you again. Sit down, now ; sit down, and we will drink the good Niersteiner. He harms no one—he is my best doctor."

"You really look ill, Müller," said Paul, with concern ; "I am afraid you don't take care of yourself."

He drew his chair up to the table, and watched the old man as he poured the choice yellow wine into the glasses, and raised his own to his lips with the familiar "*Hoch*."

"And now, what news—what has happened since I left you in your great English *Schloss* ?" asked the old German presently. "Have you got used to the life ?"

"I am afraid I never shall," said the young earl sadly. "If you only knew, Müller, how pleasant it is to hear the old familiar 'Paul' without any ceremonious prefix ! I fear I am not one who takes kindly to grandeur. I have serious thoughts of shutting up Amersley, and bringing the boy over here and educating him in Germany."

"I should not advise it," said Müller thoughtfully. "An English nobleman had best have an English education."

"I detest public schools—they are a hotbed of iniquity," exclaimed Paul.

"*Ach, mein Freund*," said old Müller, shaking his grey head in

meek reproof, "you and I know well enough that vice is, and always has been, and that all young manhood must wade through the mire of tempting and example before it can leave the mud behind, and stand in the clear stream that is the mirror of experience. What you learnt, your son will also learn. You may guard him—protect him as you will—but ignorance is not innocence, and abstinence is not purity. To every heart—to every life—comes the hour of temptation—the trial by which it shall rise or fall. Who should know that better, Paul, than you and I?"

Their eyes met with the comprehension of an unforgotten memory, and over each face stole the sadness and regret that that memory brought.

"Tell me," said the old man earnestly, but sinking his voice to a lower key, "tell me, Paul, has *she* followed you home as she threatened?"

"No," he said with a shudder. "I told her no threats—no law—no power on earth would ever induce me to take her back. She knows I am determined. She has been wise enough to remain in Australia. She has ample reasons. She may do what she likes with her life, but never again shall it have share or place in mine."

Müller's face grew graver. "I have often wished to tell you," he said with hesitation. "But I did not quite like. She was very good to your poor Sheba. She nursed her through all that terrible time. I think—in a way she was sorry for her."

Paul's face grew white as death. "How did they meet?" he said. "You never told me, Müller."

"No. The tragedy was sad enough without details. She—she happened to be in the neighbourhood. There was a storm. She sheltered with us, and Sheba was taken ill. We had no women folk, as you know, so she stayed there and nursed her."

"My God—it seems horrible!" groaned Paul, covering his face with his hands. "My poor girl!—she did not know, Müller? Surely she was spared *that* shame?"

"I think she did not know," said the old man cautiously. "Of course, I could never be quite sure. They were together when I came home that evening—and Sheba was never again fully conscious. The doctor seemed to think she never would have recovered her reason."

"But that looks as if she must have had some shock," said Paul anxiously. "You told me she was in fairly good health; and she was young and strong. I—I never had any dread for her."

"No—nor I either. But what could we know about women—you and I, Paul? What does any man know about them before he learns to care for one, and then—it is so often too late."

"It was 'too late' in my case," said Paul drearily. "How often do I feel that I never ought to have left her. She had the first and greatest claim on me. And now that burden of regret will go with me all my life—all my life!"

"It seems poor consolation to say so—but do you not think, Paul, it would have been very hard for her had she lived? Your position is changed. You could not have lived with her openly in the face of the world as . . . as you were doing. Our own codes of morality are all very well, Paul; but we cannot set the laws of society at defiance for all that. Your position had—nay, has—obligations that you must fulfil. I think no one would have been quicker to recognize that than Sheba herself——"

A look of anger and impatience came into the young man's face. "One may talk and talk," he said, "but one cannot kill feeling. Do you suppose anything you tell me is new to me? Have I not said it to myself over and over again? But what is the use? This one passion dominates my whole life with its undying memories. Waking or sleeping I know no forgetfulness. I tell you I envy my poor girl in her watery grave. I would have followed her gladly enough if it had not been for just the child."

"It would have been useless, Paul—useless. However little we desire life, we are bound to endure its burdens—we cannot cut ourselves off from *ourselves*—if we but rationally consider the matter. Life is the result of something capable of producing life, and giving it visible presence on earth; but though that *visible* presence ceases to exist, the power which caused it does not. The natural seed of the plant sinks into the ground—decays, rots, and seems to perish. We know that that seeming death is but productive of a new life. How, then, can we be so foolish as to imagine that with our own will we can cease to be—any more than that by our own will we came into existence?

Suicide is but a madness—the suspension of reason under the strain of severe mental trouble, or temporary despair. But for aught men know they carry that trouble and despair with them on to another plane. Because for *us* they cease to exist, does not authorize us to say they do so for themselves.”

“Ah, Müller,” said the young man, raising his heavy eyes to the kindly face, “if in all your philosophies I could find one grain of comfort, or obtain an hour’s forgetfulness, believe me they would know no more enthusiastic student. But they rather add to despair than alleviate it.”

“I thank Fate,” said Müller quaintly, “that I delivered my heart into no woman’s keeping. If my loss has been great according to you, Paul, so also has been my gain. Human love is but a snare for the reason and a lasting sorrow to the soul. A little hour of bliss that promises everything—a long, long night of darkness that knows each promise broken and each hope unfulfilled. We seek to draw happiness to ourselves. We find it a myth—a dream without substance. Then to our disappointed eyes life shows but emptiness—blackness—despair.”

“You give me scant comfort, Müller,” said Paul drearily. “I am to live on because life exchanged for death means but the vengeance of Death on Life. I am to expect nothing, hope nothing, gain nothing, and yet be content with the fate that has bestowed these undesired gifts on me. Truly the prospect is cheering.”

“Life has only one good gift, Paul,” said the old man. “It is Hope. Not a narrow hope, an individual hope, but a widespread universal hope in the Wisdom that has created and the Destiny that must fulfil. We must not narrow our feelings into a selfish groove, nor dream that the universe at large was created for individual benefit. So long as we do so we must expect disappointment. The animal nature of man craves for love, joy, content, for itself alone; the Divine element in him—that spark of the inherited Godhead which, alas! is so often hidden under the dark cloak of earthly selfishness—that alone is content to live for others, and in their gain forget its own loss.”

His voice and face had grown very grave. His eyes were bent on the sad face of the one friend for whom he had ever really cared in the true sense of friendship.

"I cannot comfort you, Paul," he said gently; "I feel that—but all the same my sympathy is yours, as it always has been. For the rest, there is no physician whose cures are so sure as—Time."

CHAPTER V.

IN HEIDELBERG.

MÜLLER'S faith in Time as a physician might have been large, but Paul could not share it. It seemed to him as if the very springs of his life were broken; as if never again could he know content, peace, forgetfulness.

The very accession to fortune, the sudden exemption from all anxiety, so far as material matters were concerned, only left his nature at the mercy of his feelings, and denied him the anodyne which work and occupation might have granted. Remorse gnawed at his very heart-strings. It seemed to him that the life he had ruined, the gifts he had destroyed, the genius that for his sake had flung itself into the arms of everlasting silence, would always face him with their unuttered reproach.

From the hour he had left Sheba Ormatroyd, the hour of that terrible parting, no word or sign had come to him, till Müller, in all kindness and gentleness, had broken the news of her death.

The full shock and horror of it only reached him by degrees; reached him in interludes of reason, when his numbed brain and tortured mind had struggled back to the consciousness of life, and the importance of new duties and obligations. Two years had passed since he had left her, years that had left their mark on him as no other years of his eventful and troubled life had left it.

A man does not show his wounds to the world, but they bleed inwardly for all that, and dry eyes and smiling lips are only too often the mask of tortures that no one suspects; from which men would shrink with horror if they could only read below the surface.

Paul's nature had never been a light one, and his love for Sheba Ormatroyd had called up in it all that was deepest, purest, best. No doubt human laws are very wise and very just; no doubt to legislate and uphold morality is the bounden duty of

society; but how can any laws implant the *feeling* for the morality they would enforce? It is a somewhat strange fact that that feeling in its purest and highest sense will often only awake at the bidding of circumstances which are directly opposed to external morality, which cannot accede to its laws, or be ruled by its decisions.

True, such cases may be exceptional, and one could scarcely expect them to be viewed as the basis of any law which desires to protect the weak and punish the vicious; but because they *are* exceptional, and because when they do exist they rather tend to elevate than degrade the human race, to foster nobler feelings in men and women than the barter of the marriage market, or the fierce frenzy of a brief passion, ought they to be scoffed at and condemned?

Paul Meredith had been bound by legal and moral obligations to a vicious and abandoned woman. With the riper judgment of manhood, when passion is ruled by sense, and love bears with it those diviner elements of unselfishness, patience, forbearance—when it can reverence as well as adore, and recognize what is highest in itself as well as in the object of its worship, he had loved with that one true and lasting love that never comes twice to any human life.

That love bound him as never law or force of men's opinions could have done. Bound him not only for the life that had given itself to him, but for all his own life also. While his heart beat, while his memory lived, while thought and sense could sway his soul with passionate remembrance, then every such beat of heart, such thrill of memory, such passion of remembrance meant for him only the love of one woman, the unbroken and unbreakable fidelity he had sworn to her.

If she was not here beside him in the visible universe, yet none the less was she his in every memory of the beautiful spirit, the tender womanhood, that had so freely and frankly given themselves to him in all their pure and gracious youth.

It seemed to him that no sin could have been deeper, no insult greater, than even for one hour to give her place to another woman, or to seek forgetfulness in the sorceries and temptings that beguile men's senses, though they disgust their wiser moments. Voluntarily he chose for himself the deepest loneliness that man could seek: the loneliness that is before and in the world, but in

reality utterly and entirely apart from it. He hated his life and its obligations; he hated the false smiles and honeyed words with which women wooed him, the proffered follies and excitements that made up the life of men of the world. A great duty, however hard, he would have accepted. A great sacrifice, however painful, he would have made; but the obligations that bound him to society irritated him beyond endurance, and disgusted him as only heartlessness, vanity and insincerity can disgust man's higher nature.

Perhaps in no time since the shock and sense of his great trouble had fallen upon him, had he known such peaceful and almost untroubled hours as in that first week he spent at Heidelberg. He and Müller spent most of their time roaming about the old *Schloss* and its beautiful grounds.

The sweet spring weather was wooing leaf and flower. The dull red walls and picturesque ruins were framed in by new tints of vivid green; the river sparkled and foamed over its rocky bed below, catching every gleam of sunshine and every passing shadow. Müller and Paul would sit under the trees or on some broken rock of the ruins, reading or talking in the old cynical speculative fashion, till the sun went westering down the hill, and the bright Neckar water would darken under its foam, and then they would saunter back through the quaint old town and have supper together in one of the least fashionable hotels, where there was less chance of noisy students dropping in to arrange for the challenging of a rival corps, or discuss some impending duel.

Occasionally Müller would invite some learned doctor or professor to join their simple suppers, and then Paul would listen and say little, sometimes interested, sometimes wearied over the long discussion of other men's thoughts, the endless controversies to which each new theory gave rise, and the apparently little advantage that had been, or ever would be, gained from all these profound philosophies and speculations.

But the life pleased him as no phase of life in these past two years had done, and the smart of his wound grew less keen, though he knew the wound itself would never cease to throb with the pain of memories and the passion of regret.

He saw with sorrow that Müller was really beginning to feel and show the infirmities of age. His intellect was still keen and vigorous, but he soon grew weary of discussions; his eye had lost

its brightness, his frame its strength and vitality. He was less intolerant of opinion, and less dogmatic in argument. It pleased him more to smoke his big pipe and listen to others, than to assert himself.

Perhaps the warning that age brings, made him thoughtful. Before long there would be no need to speculate about that misty and unknown future. The veil would be lifted and he would learn its secrets for himself.

And unknown to every one, even to Paul, there lived in his heart a terrible remorse for the fate of Sheba Ormatroyd. That tragic death of hers had done more to age him than any one suspected. He never could quite forgive himself, never feel sure that he had not in some way undermined those habitual instincts which tend to keep women pure, even against greater temptations than she had known.

Foolish and irrational as their faiths may be, if those faiths have a natural hold on their instincts they also lend them strength. He had uprooted all such faiths from the garden of a young girl's mind, left her with no foothold for trust—no purpose for prayer—no hope in the dark afterwards that closes on life as surely as night on day.

He had never cared for any feminine thing as he had learnt to care for Sheba. He had been quick to recognize her gifts of mind, and appreciate her faithful and passionate nature. Yet no gifts, and no strength, and no fidelity had saved her from the common fate of womanhood.

They will not save any woman if she once lets love rule her life.

Müller had always dimly recognized that fact, and rather pitied its truth than blamed its folly. Had he been true to the creeds of his own philosophies, he might have asked himself whether he had any right to blame one sex for possessing instincts denied to the other. Those instincts were so universal that they seemed to imply some common gift of inheritance. Where is the woman who does not love best the man who has caused her the greatest amount of suffering?

If sorrow brings forth the poet's sweetest song, so surely does pain bring forth a woman's deepest feelings. Why, we can not explain; but if history and research and observation teach anything, then assuredly they teach that truth.

Are not the greatest loves on record, also the most unfortunate?

What history does happiness leave that lingers in men's memories half so long as some record of sorrow and misfortune and ill-fate? It is a strange fact, but a true one, that though all humanity rebels against suffering, it is through suffering only that its best lessons are learnt, its deepest feelings touched, its grandest heroisms achieved. In youth we long for happiness, the enjoyment of the day and the hour. With maturer years we learn that there are deeper depths in our natures than material enjoyment can satisfy: sorrows sweeter than happiness, trials dearer than success, love the lovelier for the halo of undying sadness that crowns its brows.

But to reach such truths means the traversing of many a weary road, the disillusion of many a blissful dream, the torture of many doubts, the scorch of many tears, the heartaches of many days and nights.

And then when reached are they worth so very much after all?

Only if the discipline of one life is to pave the way to the higher and purer gain of another; if the seeming barren desert may yet bloom with the flowers of unselfishness, and the blossoms of patience and tenderness and truth.

No life is complete without love, because love alone can teach it its highest gain and its deepest loss. But the purest and greatest love is only that which knows self-forgetfulness, and while living for another's happiness finds therein its own.

The law of love owns no deep philosophy, no subtle mysticism, and needs no arbitrator for its fate, because, to it, that fate is an ordained and unalterable decree.

When it comes as the dawn of divinity, the soul yields and the heart acknowledges its reality. But to explain its presence, or analyze its reasons, or argue its effects is as impossible as to dissect the dew, or paint the rainbow, or fetter the winds of heaven.

Well has the poet said of man:

" Out of earth's elements mingled with flame,
Out of life's compound of glory and shame,
Fashioned and shaped by no will of our own,
Helplessly into life's history thrown;
Born to conditions we could not foresee,
Born by a law which compels us to be,
Born by one law, through all nature the same,
What makes us differ, and who is to blame?"

Ay, who is to blame? Through innumerable ages that cry has arisen from tortured hearts, from seeking souls. But in the void and silence from whence man issued, the answer still lies hidden. Blind instruments of an incomprehensible fate, so we live and move, and suffer and die, knowing as little of our end as we know of our beginning, asking even in the veriest bigotry of an apparently satisfied faith, "Am I quite sure—quite safe—quite satisfied?"

Let who will answer to his fellow man. Will any be brave enough, or honest enough, to answer to his own *very self* the one question which makes of that self at once a judge and an avenger?

(*To be continued.*)

At the Wells.

By FANNY L. GREEN.

THE fame of "The Wells," unlike that of its rival, "The Bath," does not date from pre-historic times, but the vogue of its healing springs was early strengthened by royal favour.

When the gay and kitten-like queen of Charles II. came with the court to drink the waters Lord North is fabled to have discovered two reigns before, "The Wells," as the courtier, de Grammont, tells us, were thought the most rural and simple, and, at the same time, the most entertaining of all the watering-places of Europe. They were the general rendezvous of "all the gay and handsome of both sexes," and the company, though numerous, was always select.

Since the modern town was only in course of growing up, the visitors whom fashion and the rage for trying new remedies sent thither were, for the most part, lodged in "little, clean, and convenient habitations" that lay straggling and separated from each other, a mile-and-a-half all round the springs.

The social meeting place of the company was even then the Walk—the Pantiles, and Parade of a later day. There, "shaded by spreading trees," the beaux and belles drank the waters. Nor had they to wander far from the springs in the search for amusement which filled their days. On one side of the Walk was a long row of shops, "plentifully stocked with all manner of toys, lace, gloves and stockings," where raffling might be enjoyed "as at Paris, in the Foire de Saint Germain." On the other stood the market, where "young, fair, fresh-coloured country girls, with clean linen, small straw hats and neat shoes and stockings," sold game, vegetables, flowers and fruit; while in the evening the whole company assembled at the bowling-green to dance in the open air on "a turf more soft and smooth than the finest carpet in the world."

The pleasure-seeking queen did not fail to supplement these *al fresco* balls with amusements of a more courtly nature. Every day there was dancing at her apartments, and other entertainments were devised by her "to digest the waters." It was to spite Miss Stewart, than whom no woman had "less wit or more beauty," that Catherine sent for Nell Gwynne and the players. But the placid, childish beauty showed no jealousy of the orange-girl. At "The Wells," there was many an occasion for her favourite game of "blind man's buff," and doubtless she built card castles of a very literal sort there. We know that that was the custom of this favourite "when the deepest play was going on in her apartments," and eager courtiers, striving for royal favour, handed her the cards.

De Grammont accounts for the popularity of the little watering-place very simply. "Here," he says, "one may live as one pleases; here is likewise deep play and no want of amorous intrigue."

It soon grew impossible to live as one pleased at "The Wells," and the "person of quality" who wrote that dreary seventeenth-century play, "Tunbridge Wells, or a Day's Courtship," was of opinion that "these dull waters render intrigue too phlegmatic and serious." Though less captious critics came in crowds—

"To see the fine Ladies in their Deshabille,
A Dress that's sometimes the most studied to kill"—

it was the high play that made "The Wells."

Tired of "a solitude of country squires, parsons' wives, and visiting tenants," the world of fashion eagerly forsook village life for a place where they might have each other's company, and win each other's money as they had done during the winter in town.

E. O., a game in which the bank gained two-and-a-half per cent. on all that was lost or won, was first set up at "The Wells," and other "unlawful games," Fair-chance, Faro, and Ace of Hearts, were traps for the unwary.

Fathers caned their sons on the Pantiles before all the company for "running them a great deal in debt." But few players escaped from the tables as well as a Mr. Hedges whose adventures have been circumstantially preserved for us.

This gentleman, in the year, 1715, had been two years married

to a lady of great beauty and large fortune. One day he began to bet for trifling sums, and bitten with this new freak, frequented the hazard tables every night till he lost his estate, his equipage, and his wife's jewels. Then, pulling his "repeating watch" forth from his pocket, he sought to wager it for sixty guineas, and since no person in the company would set even a third of that amount on it, he flung it on the floor and tried to dash out his brains against the marble mantelpiece.

The company restrained him from this act of violence, and he went home to be met by his wife with the tidings of his succession to his uncle's estate.

The unhappy man explained that he had wagered the reversion at *the wells*, and now owed £1,000 more than he could pay.

'My dear, you have lost but a trifle, and owe nothing,' cried his wife. "Our brother and I have taken care to prevent the effects of your rashness, and are actually the persons who have won your fortune. We employed proper persons for this purpose, who brought their winnings to me. Your money, your equipage, are in my possession." The sequel to the story says that the grateful husband never afterwards played for the smallest sums.

One is not surprised at a summary order, issued in the reign of George II., but otherwise undated. It was probably occasioned by the coming to "The Wells," in 1737, of "a shoal of gamblers who encouraged every species of play—Hazard, Pharoah (*sic*), and Ace of Hearts."

The Mandate runs :

QUARTER SESSIONS AT MAIDSTONE, GEORGE II.:—"This Court being informed that of late Years, at the usual Season of Resort, at Tunbridge Wells, in this County, several unlawful Games, called *Fairchance*, *Faro*, *Ace of Hearts*, and other-unlawful Games, contrary to the Laws and Statutes of this Realm, are there carried on, exercised and supported, and several Persons attend to support the same who are not known to have any other visible Way of Living, to the Great Disturbance and Damage of his Majesty's good Subjects resorting to and frequenting the said Wells for their Health, or other lawful Occasions: For preventing which Mischiefs and Disorders, and suppressing of the said unlawful Games in the future, it is thought fit and ordered by this Court, that it be recommended to the several Justices of Peace of this County, of the Division wherein

Tunbridge Wells lie, or who shall be there residing, to assemble and meet together as often as there shall be Occasion to take and use such lawful Means as may be most effectual for preventing any of the said unlawful Games at the Places aforesaid ; or any Riots or Routs occasioned thereby ; and the Constables and Borsholders, and other Peace officers of the Parish of Speldhurst, and other Parishes in this County where Tunbridge Wells, or the Houses or Buildings thereunto adjoining, is, or are, situate, are hereby required to be aiding and assisting to the said Justices of Peace, as they and every one of them will answer the Contrary at their Peril : And the said Constables, Borsholders, and other Peace officers, are hereby further ordered to give publick Notice of the Order by affixing Copies thereof in the most notorious Places near Tunbridge Wells aforesaid : And it is also farther ordered by this Court, That this Order be forthwith printed and published in the *London Gazette* for the better Notification thereof, that no Person may pretend Ignorance."

The habit of play was too deep rooted to be more than temporarily restrained. Though E.O. is not mentioned in this Order, it was in full swing at "The Wells" in 1749, and from that place was introduced to the company of "The Bath."

From 1725 to 1734, a very notable character, one Bell Causey, "presided as absolute governess at Tunbridge Wells, and directed the Company in all their pleasures and amusements." She is described as "a fine, but very large woman, extremely well known in those days for attending with her nymphs at the Ring in Hyde Park with oranges, nosegays, etc., as likewise for an expert conveyance of *billets doux*." During the summer season, service was "performed" every day at the chapel dedicated to King Charles the Martyr, and as the company came from the ministrations of the clergyman supported by their subscriptions, Bell would inveigle them to the rooms she conducted for "raffles or other amusing purposes," an incongruity which occasioned the satirical strain :

"Decent orders, decent airs,
Adorn the walks, the rooms, the prayers :
For beaux and belles to church come all,
Nothing prevents them but—a ball,
And most polite the congregation,
Tho' boots and dishabille's the fashion."

This "governess of Tunbridge Wells" was of a lavish disposition, adored for her gifts by the poor. When she took in hand the collection of a charity, the subscription for a raffle, or the getting up of an entertainment to amuse the company, she went very systematically about the matter. It was her "constant custom to place herself at the top of the steps leading to the Walks, and, as the company came from the chapel, with her apron spread in both hands, to hustle them, as they do chickens, to any place and for any purpose she wanted them for; and if she espied any newcomers of rank, she instantly wished them much joy of arriving so seasonably when there was an opportunity of entertaining the company with a public breakfast or tea-drinking."

So great, we are told, was the influence of this woman at "The Wells," that she "would not suffer the great Beau Nash to have any power there while she lived, and absolutely kept him from the place till she died."

The very next year, 1735, Dr. Pellett sent that "*beau garçon*" down to Mount Ephraim, though he swore he could not drink the Tunbridge waters, and he at once "took the lead in promoting union and every possible public entertainment for the company." The ladies wrote verses to him, and during his whole reign scarce a day, and never a week, passed without some junketing of a public kind.

There is preserved in the British Museum a coloured print of "The Remarkable Characters who were at Tunbridge Wells with Richardson in 1748, with references in his own writing," which, combined with a letter he wrote to his "filial friend," Miss Westcomb, gives us a lively picture of "The Wells" under Nash's régime.

The great novelist's verdict on the place was akin to Horace Walpole's epigram on Bath: "These watering-places that mimic a capital and add vulgarisms and familiarities of their own, seem to me like abigails in cast gowns, and I am not young enough to take up with either."

"You are absolutely right," says the creator of Pamela, "in judging that I would rather be in a desert than in a place so public and so giddy. I traverse the utmost edges of the walks that I may stand in nobody's way, nor have my dizziness increased by the swimming triflers."

Even sex seems to have been no defence against his criticism. The summer he spent at "The Wells" was "a very full season," and scores of belles were present whom he ungallantly decried as "flatterers, triflers who swim along these walks, self-satisfied and pleased, and looking defiance to men," bashfulness being considered as lack of breeding. "When one such starts up, she is nicknamed a Beauty, and old fellows and young fellows are set a-spinning after her."

Miss Peggy Banks, a long-necked beauty, is one of the fine ladies in voluminous hoops sketched for us with pen and pencil.

"Miss Banks was the belle," says the novelist, "when I first came down. Yet she had been so many seasons here that she obtained but a faint and languid attention. The smart began to put her down in their list of had-beens."

With the rival who supplanted her, the Kitty Crocodile of Foote's "Capuchin," the model of Beatrix Esmond and Baroness Bernstein, the world's tongue was not yet busy. Miss Chudleigh's marriage with Hervey was still a secret, nor had the Duke of Kingston appeared on the scene. The maid of honour was "the triumphant toast of the Wells, a lively, sweet-tempered, gay, self-admired, and, not altogether without reason, generally admired lady. She moved not without crowds after her. She smiled at every one. Every one smiled before they saw her, when they heard she was on the Walk. She played, she lost, she won—all with equal good humour. But, alas! she went off before she was wished to go off. And then the fellows' hearts were almost broke for a new beauty."

Cibber, the Laureate, at the ripe age of seventy-seven, was still fond of new faces. He fell "over head and ears in love with Miss Chudleigh, and her admirers (such was his happiness) were not jealous of him, but, pleased with that wit in him which they had not, were always for calling him to her. She said pretty things, for she was Miss Chudleigh. He said pretty things, for he was Mr. Cibber; and all the company, men and women, seemed to think they had an interest in what was said, and were half as well pleased as if they had said the sprightly things themselves; and mighty well contented were they to be second-hand repeaters of the pretty things."

This "extraordinary old man," whose conversation "the great Doctor" said was "one half oaths," was in great favour at "The

Wells." During his stay, he had written a dialogue between a father and a daughter, calculated, in Richardson's opinion, to "throw down all distinction between parents and children." This he read to "half a dozen at a time of the fair sex," and every daughter in his audience seemed "mightily pleased with a lesson that will teach her to top her father."

The novelist did not fail to rally the playwright on his passion. "Once," he says, "I faced the laureate, squatted upon one of the benches, with a face more wrinkled than ordinary with disappointment. 'I thought,' said I, 'you were of the party at the tea treats. Miss Chudleigh is gone into the tea room.' 'Pshaw!' said he, 'there is no coming at her, she is so surrounded by the toupets.' And I left him upon the pet. But he was called, too, soon after; and in he flew, and his face shone again and looked smooth."

Oddly enough, Richardson makes no mention of the chief of lexicographers in his letter to Miss Westcomb. Nor does wordy Boswell give any hint of a visit his patron paid "The Wells" at this time. But the plate of "Celebrities" shows Dr. Johnson in grave converse with the Bishop of Salisbury, while his cherished "Tetty" turns her back on "the noted Mr. Whiston." This eccentric's part was "showing eclipses, and explaining other phenomena of the stars (*sic*), and preaching the Millennium and anabaptism to gay people" who, if they had white teeth, heard him "with open mouths, though, perhaps, shut their hearts," and after his lecture was over, ran from him "to flutter among the loud-laughing young fellows upon the Walks, like boys and girls at a breaking-up."

Despite Miss Chudleigh's triumphs, the slighted Miss Banks seems to have had a constant cavalier in Mr. Lyttelton. He was the author whose "Dialogues" provoked the Johnsonian comment, "That man sat down to write a book to tell the world what the world had all his life been telling him." High praise, one might think, if the Doctor had not gone on to call the work "a nugatory performance." The Speaker and Lord Powis were also admirers of this lady.

One is reminded by a letter of Garrick's from "The Wells" of another criticism of the Doctor's: "Davy is futile." "I go to bed," the player says, "at eleven, rise at seven drink no malt, and think of nothing. Old Cibber is here, and very merry we are. Mr. Lyttelton and I are cup and can. I played at E. O.,

and won. I don't dance, and eat like a ploughman." In Richardson's plate, he is represented in a fine red waistcoat, paying his court to Frasi, the prima donna of the opera.

A less easy life was that of Loggan, "original dwarf to the Prince and Princess of Wales," and fan painter. He limned these "Celebrities," and introduced his own misshapen form into the left corner of the plate, where he stands talking to the "Woman of the Wells."

This sobriquet would seem to be another nickname of Mrs. Sarah Porter, the "Queen of the Touters." Nash brought her to his rooms in the Walk to solicit the subscriptions for him, and we are told that "there was not a person of the least rank or credit that she let escape. She pretended to know the fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and every relation of any person of distinction, had a shrewd memory, and could recollect or forget whatever was for her interest." It was her custom to stand at the ball-room door and make "some thousand curtseys in a day." Nor had she the least faith or inclination to trust. If any individual did not immediately subscribe to her, she would take her book, pen, and ink, in her hand, and follow them all round the room when it was full of company, which made many of them often very angry; but rating, swearing at her, or any other severe method was never known to put her out of humour, or make her uncivil to the company.

Many other curious figures were seen daily on the Pantiles during Nash's *régime*. At one time "Lord" Raulins, "the Wells cryer," used to sing the "Touting Song" there, and deliver speeches taught him by the Duke of Wharton. This peer took him to London "ridiculously but richly dressed." For a time he showed off at the clubs, but pride is said to have turned his head. He went mad and died in the parish workhouse.

Another person of flighty wits, "Lady Tunbridge," a tall, meagre figure, fantastically dressed, used constantly to be seen about the Walks, muttering to herself. It is pleasant to know that, "not being in any way mischievous, she picked up a comfortable subsistence."

The company's shoes were cleaned by "Sir Robert," who was very like in face to Sir Robert Walpole, and used to tell the crowd, when Sir Edward Walpole visited "The Wells," that it was surprising his brother did not take more notice of him.

Dunmail, "the prophet," was a person of greater standing. His craze was that he had been in the world ever since the creation, and would never die. In every affair of importance he believed himself directed by the angel Gabriel, a delusion which led sometimes to ludicrous results. On one occasion a pedlar at his request told him his name. "Are you sure that is your real name?" said the prophet. "Certainly," replied the packman. "Why, then, I have received an order from the angel Gabriel to give you ten guineas." "The same angel has blessed me with an order to receive it," said the pedlar, quietly, as he pocketed the coin.

No survey, however slight, of the social life of "The Wells" would be complete without a mention of those "Water Poets, an innocent tribe," whom Addison said deserved all the support he could give them. Less friendly is another contemporary criticism, "They begin with a blaze and end with a vapour." There is, in truth, a good deal of sameness in the verses the poor poets used to "scribble every season, to deify some nymph or lady." It was the custom for a copy of these poems to be left at the bookseller's shop, and entered in a book there, for the inspection and entertainment of the company. The curious may to-day scan more than a hundred of the water poets' effusions in various collections of *Tunbrigiolia*.

In 1756, "the great Beau Nash" died, not before he had outlived his popularity even in "the celebrated province he added to the empire of Bath." The star of "The Wells" was now on the wane, though "the civil and polite Mr. Caulet" followed manfully in the Beau's "generous steps."

The most detailed sketch we have of the social life of "The Wells" is preserved for us in a mere newspaper cutting, the *naïve* letter of "Marinus," sent to a friend on the 30th of August, 1767, from his quiet, snug lodging on Mount Ephraim, "where he lived with the family."

"By a strict Perseverance in using the Waters, with a gentle Ride every Day when the Weather would permit me," says our author, "I have got quite rid of the Relaxation and vast Depression, the severe Fever I had last Winter and a nine months Ague had thrown me into."

"As to the place and its Environs, it is to me in fine Weather as agreeable and pleasant a Place as ever I saw, and in bad Weather as disagreeable except on the Walks themselves, where

either by Chance or Foresight in the first Constructors you can go from the Well to all the Rooms, Coffee houses and Shops, without being exposed to Rain or Sun.

"On your first Arrival, nay, even on the Road, you are *touted* (a cant word for soliciting your Custom at this place) by all the Bakers, Butchers, Brewers, Grocers, Tavern Keepers, Water Dippers, etc., etc., and on the first Morning, before you are well awake, by the Musick, to whom I find, besides a small present for thus disturbing you, every Family and single Gentleman subscribes from Half-a-Crown to Half-a-Guinea, for which they play in a Gallery built for that Purpose facing the Great Rooms on the Walks three times a Day, viz. from 9 till 10 in the Morning, from 12 till 2 at Noon, and from 6 till 7 in the Afternoon, and at the Balls. On your entering into any of the Great Rooms, you are solicited in the same Manner, where the Subscription is from a Crown to a Guinea, each Person according to their Rank; for which you are entitled to walk in the Rooms, to have Fires lighted for you, to read the News Papers which come every Day, to Wax Wafers, Pens and Ink. There are two Rooms, one on the Walks which I find very necessary and comfortable to me in bad Weather, the other on the other side which is seldom troubled but in the evenings. The Company go to these Rooms alternately, every Evening, to play at Cards or converse together as at Bath; and there is a Ball once a Week at each Room; on Tuesdays at that on the Walks, and on Friday at the other; the Expence of which is Half-a-Crown Entrance for each Gentleman and one Shilling each Lady, and this, I must own, I think a much better Method than subscribing Two Guineas, as at Bath, especially to Persons who stay but a short Time, as it is no Expence but when you go.

"There is likewise the Gentlemen's Coffee House on the Walks kept by a very decent Woman, where you likewise subscribe five Shillings and where the political and other Disputes between the Gentlemen (some of them, I assure you, very high Characters) are particularly entertaining and amusing. Then there is the Bookseller's Shop, kept by a very facetious, intelligent Man, where you subscribe as to the Great Rooms and have what Books you please Home to your Lodging to read, and there being a great and well-chosen Variety, I found it particularly useful and agreeable to me in bad Weather.

"There is likewise a Collection made by some Person of the Company for the Clergyman, from one-and-a-half to two Guineas for each Family. This Gentleman performs Service twice every Day, and is kind in procuring us as many excellent Sermons as possible from the dignified and other Clergy who visit this Place. There is likewise a Collection and voluntary Subscription for a Dissenting Minister here, a very well behaved Gentleman. Mr. Derrick is, I find, Master of the Ceremonies here, as at Bath, and is supported, as there, by having a Ball at each Room, Tickets for which are five Shillings each, but he gives so much satisfaction in this important Office that very few give him less than Gold for his Tickets.

"There is another small Subscription to the Sweeper of the Walks (which are kept very clean) of one Shilling each Person, or as much more as the Generosity of the Donors please, but not less. At going from hence, you give the Water Dippers, a Set of very decent Women who constantly attend at the Well to serve you with your Water from the Spring, from a Crown to a Guinea, or more if you stay a long Time, and likewise to the Waiters of the Rooms, who, I find, have nothing but what the Company please to give them on going away, and which, I find, is according to the Rank of the Family.

"Almost every Body go to Market here themselves, all the Market women standing at the Steps at the end of the Walks from seven till ten in the Morning in such a Manner that you are almost obliged to pass through them. They behave with great Civility.

"We have a good old Woman here, the best Pastry-Cook in England. I wish you was here to eat one of her Chicken Pyes and Cheese Cakes. There are plenty of Milliners and Toy Shops.

"The Post comes in every Day except Monday about eleven in the Morning, and goes out every Day except Saturday and Monday at five in the Afternoon. They have been this Season particularly well accommodated by two Flys which run in opposition to each other, which carry four Persons only and are never more than five Hours or five-and-a-half on the Road. One sets out at five in the Morning from hence and gets in London at eleven and returns from thence at one. The other sets out from London at the same Time in the Morning and returns from

hence at one, by which the Company have an Opportunity of having Turbots, Fruit, etc., in Time for Dinner and of sending Wheat Ears from hence to their Friends in London. The Fare is Half-a-Guinea. The Common Stage Coach sets out every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for London at six in the Morning and arrives about two. It returns every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at the same Hours."

It was in the reign of George III., as we have said, that the decadence of "The Wells" began. As early as 1773, only six years after the letter of "Marinus," an anonymous critic describes the company at this watering-place as "an odd olio of old maids, lively widows, batchelors and a few nobility." Still, life went on its old course. The company lounged, laughed, talked nonsense, and lolled the day away after sipping the waters. Their morning was passed "in an undress, in drinking the waters, in private or public breakfasts, in attending prayers at the chapel, in social converse on the parade, at the coffee house, in the public rooms or booksellers' shop, and in raffling, cheapening and buying goods at the milliners', turners' and other shops." Later in the day, there were cotillon dances and private concerts, with now and then an "adventitious and extraordinary novelty, a painter, a musician, a juggler, a fire-eater or a philosopher." After dinner all went "dressed to the parade again and to the rooms to tea in private parties or in public." At night to the balls or assembly, sometimes to the theatre, when there were any in the company who would bespeak a play.

"Poor Tunbridge," says a chronicler of fashionable nothings in the *European Magazine* of 1782, "has been long on the wane. Except the Duke of Leeds and Lord Caermarthen, who perhaps may have an hereditary failing for the place, no other individual of great consequence appears with any constancy the tutelary of this place, and Lord Caermarthen's *umbra*, Mr. Jackson, is oftener present than his lordship."

"Royal" Weymouth and Scarborough had supplanted "The Wells" with the exclusives. "What company there is there," we are told gravely, "is of the best, except a black-leg or two."

But "The Wells," notwithstanding its rivals, held up its head gallantly and duly observed the rules of its M.C. The code of Tyson in 1780 is the earliest that has come down to us :

I.—That there be two Public Balls, every week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Ladies to pay 2s. ; gentlemen, 3s. 6d.

II.—To begin with Minuets and then Country Dances. All restrictions in point of dress to be abolished, except in regard to those ladies who intend to dance Minuets, who are requested to be properly dressed for this purpose.

III.—One Cotillion (*sic*) only, immediately after tea, will be danced, and to prevent the time being lost in the choice of the particular Cotillion, and in practising it, the Master of the Ceremonies will undertake himself to name it, and its figure shall be previously put up in the Great Rooms, that they may be acquainted with it.

IV.—As the custom of dancing two following dances only, with the same lady, at present prevails pretty generally, the Master of the Ceremonies thinks it proper to establish it as a rule here.

V.—The Master of the Ceremonies thinks it almost needless to observe that it is deemed a point of good breeding, for those ladies who have gone down with the dance, to continue in their places till the rest have done the same.

VI.—The Master of the Ceremonies desires the company to come early, that the Balls may begin at the usual hour of seven.

VII.—The Master of the Ceremonies desires to have the honour of presenting himself to the Company on their arrival, that he may not be wanting in the necessary attentions to them.

VIII.—The Chapel, being originally built by subscription, is not endowed with any provision for an established minister. As he depends for his support on the voluntary contributions of the company that frequent the place, it is hoped he may rely with confidence, for the reward of his labours, on the benevolence of those who reap the benefit of them.

IX.—It is humbly requested of all persons who frequent the rooms to subscribe, to enable the renters of them to defray the many necessary and heavy expenses attending them.

X.—Besides the Two Rooms, the other general places of Subscription are the Circulating Library, the Ladies' Coffee Room, the Gentlemen's Coffee Room and the Post Office.

XI.—The Water Dippers at the Spring, who are appointed by the Lord of the Manor, have no allowance, but depend on what is given them by those who drink the waters.

XII.—The Master of the Ceremonies hopes it will not be thought improper for him to recommend to families on leaving the place (having been any time here) to consider the Waiters of each of the Rooms. He will not presume to dictate to public generosity. Those only, therefore, who wish to be directed in this will receive the necessary information on application to him.

XIII.—It has been an old-established custom for every lady and gentleman to drop a Shilling into the Sweepers' Box, and as the poor man and his wife constantly attend the Walks and the Rooms morning and evening, and have no other means of subsisting, it is hoped that none will refuse to comply with so small and equitable a bounty.

The following were the prices of cards at this time;—Commerce with one pack, 8s. 6d., in the morning, 7s. ; Loo with one pack, 6s., two, 8s. 6d. ; Whist with two packs, 8s., in the morning, 7s. ; Piquet or All-Fours, first pack, 5s., each pack after, 3s. ; Quadrille, 8s. 6d., in the morning, 7s. ; Quinze, *ad libitum*, from 8s. 6d. ; Lottery with one pack, 10s., with two packs, 12s.

In 1801, a modern plague of watering places was introduced at "The Wells." "Asses," says an old guide-book, "were first brought into fashion by a lady of rank here in 1801."

Painsinck's "Rules for the Company" bring us down to the year 1817.

The weekly ball had then become what we now call a "Cinderella" dance. It began at nine and ended at twelve. Gentlemen were required to change their partners every two dances, and ladies who had "precedence of place" to take their places according to their precedence before the dance began. After then, they were requested to stand up in the dance without claiming it. "The custom among ladies," we are told, "of allowing their acquaintances to stand up above them is inconvenient and improper, and those who do it will be considered as violators of rule and decorum." Thursday and Saturday were now Card Assembly Evenings, and when a party of gentlemen and ladies chose to get up a dance on those nights, they paid "extra for the same." The music on these occasions and at the balls was provided by a band hired by the Master of the Ceremonies and the Proprietor of the Rooms and paid "in the following manner. The Proprietor of the Rooms to pay sixpence out of the money received for the admission of every

person at the Balls, and a general subscription of the company at 10s. 6d. each, a book for which purpose is open in the Rooms." Hazard and "other unlawful games" were forbidden in the public rooms, nor were cards allowed on Sunday evenings.

With the laying out of Tea Gardens by an "industrious gardener," in 1829, the old life of "The Wells" may be said to have come to an end. "When the company ceases to frequent the Rooms, be assured the Wells will drop," said Nash. The prophecy has fulfilled itself. The fashion of English watering-places is gone. At what place of the kind now is the company, "except a black-leg or two," of the best?

From the Eagle.

FOUR LETTERS.

LADY LYNCH, Adler Hotel, Gebenstal, to MISS ANN DUCKETT,
Eaton Place West, London.

" June 25th.

" DEAR ANN,

"Only conceive how provoking!—how inconsiderate!—after all our summer arrangements were made and settled; after our rooms at Gebenstal had been taken; after I had got as far as Botzen, expecting to meet Polly and her children there, what does one of those wretched little Giustiano Marconis do but fall ill of the measles at Florence, thus obliging her unfortunate mamma to put off her journey, to throw me over, and to remain in all that stifling heat without a soul to speak to except those odious Neapolitan relatives of her husband, whom I am sure she must rue the day she ever set eyes on! Really, when I received her letter, I felt the strongest possible impulse to turn right round, go back to Italy, and stay with poor Polly Marconis through her troubles. A few minutes, however, convinced me that it was out of the question. At sixty-two the time for knight-errantry, if it has ever existed, is distinctly over; the expenditure of energy, nay, of actual tissue, is too great; one pays too dearly for it. Seeing, therefore, that this was obviously an impossibility; seeing that it was equally impossible to remain where I was; that my rooms at the hotel were actually engaged and would doubtless have to be paid for; seeing that every one knows that my summer quarters have been fixed for the Austrian Tyrol, it seemed that the only thing to be done was to push on by myself with as little delay as possible. Accordingly I desired Perkins to get ready her boxes; telegraphed to the station nearest Gebenstal to have a carriage in readiness next morning; wrote to poor Polly to give her my best sympathies, and to tell her that, in my humble opinion, Miss Caterina

ought to be whipped ; started at 7.15 from the hotel at Botzen ; and here I am just arrived at the Adler Hotel, a white-faced, green-shuttered affair, standing at the edge of the road, with a swinging signpost overhead, supported upon a pole painted with the black and yellow stripes of Austria, with a heterogeneous crowd of guides and other hangers-on in close attendance, and with a circle of mountains behind it, snow-capped, glittering, with, best of all, a temperature at least ten degrees cooler than I have enjoyed for the last seven or eight weeks.

"My rooms, I found, had been kept for me in a sort of *dépendance* opposite the main building, so, having taken possession of them, and written my name in the visitors' book, I was taking a general survey of the scenery when a bell outside rang violently, whereupon Perkins hastily stuck a few additional and wholly unnecessary hairpins into my hair, suggested that I should put on my best lace cap instead of the third best one which I keep for travelling—an idea I promptly snubbed—and I descended to the *table d'hôte*, crossing for that purpose the road which divided the two portions of the hotel, and through a low hall or passage, something between a cellar and a tap-room, crowded, like the entrances to all Tyrolean hotels are, with a motley crowd of guides, with pipes dangling like decorations upon their breasts ; with sellers of edelweiss and mosaic brooches, and stout serving girls with huge earrings and well-filled blue bodices. Through all these I passed, the landlord himself preceding me up the stairs, and sweeping to right and left a thinner fringe of retainers as he advanced.

"The dining-room was a low room, though happily not quite so low as the hall underneath, and as I advanced to my place near the head of the table I encountered an atmosphere of boiled cabbage and a deluge of Germanic vociferation which nearly drove me back. Such brandishing of dinner knives ! such unearthly aspirates and gutturals ! such gurgling of victuals down audibly voracious throats ! You know my slight love for that eminently successful section of humanity ? I mentally made the observation that if my fellow sojourners proved to be all of the same type, even my regard for my own consistency would not enable me to stand out against them for more than a couple of days.

"Fortunately when I had taken my seat, waved away some

stuff of the nature of porridge which had been presented to me, adjusted my glasses and looked round me, I found that immediately opposite to me were seated a fresh-complexioned, unmistakably English couple, evidently not long married—he clerically decorous in pepper and salt and a white tie; she in a pink-spotted cotton frock, with soft fair hair arranged in a neat knot rather high up upon her head; small, rather prim features, and a sleek rounded figure like a young linnet's. They were very young, both of them, and, I suspected, a little shy still in their mutual relations; a trifle provincial, perhaps, but a lady and gentleman unmistakably and at the first glance.

"When the bustle of my entrance had a little subsided, the young man looked across the table, and made me a little quick official bow, which at once fixed his position. This, I said to myself, is evidently the English chaplain, whose presence had been prominently put forward as one of the attractions to Gebenstal. A moment later his wife also glanced towards me, evidently with a similar intention. Unfortunately my eye was still upon her husband, and before I had time to turn it encouragingly in her direction, she had rapidly averted her own, with a blush which covered her pretty little face up to the forehead, a small expression of offended dignity coming down at the same moment and seating itself unmistakably about the corners of her pretty mouth.

"I waited to let this momentary ebullition subside, then made some observation to the husband relative to the heat of the day and the dustiness of the roads, to which he responding, in my next conversational sally I appealed to the wife, making a little gesture of salutation as I did so, and before the end of the meal we were all three chatting together upon the friendliest terms possible.

"Dinner over, we turned out on to the road, which, as you know, is in all these Tyrolese places the rallying point of society. In this case it is a large, wide, very clean road, and as the only one in this part of the country, has a dignity and importance unknown to more perambulated regions. The sun had set, and everything was rapidly growing dark. The mountains stood solemnly round, like a circle of guardians set about some State prisoners, relaxing a little in their vigilance, however, to the eastward, where we could see a narrow gap, and

a dark blue lower range fading away towards Venice and the sea. You who know the Dolomites can imagine the general effect, without my troubling myself to construct any elaborate word pictures. Gebenstal is not, I believe, geographically speaking, part of the Dolomites, but the character of the scenery seems to me to be much the same. Huge mountain-masses, carrying the corn and maize, the fir trees and the potato crops of the valleys for some distance upwards upon their shoulders, but always ending in great untamable peaks and precipices of naked rock—cracked and torn, jagged and tremendous. Grim enough, yet exciting too, even to one who, like myself, prefers Nature with its rough edges pruned off, and its savagery a little pared down.

"I bent my steps towards a sort of small wooden *châlet*, surrounded by a balcony, which stood upon the opposite side of the road, the two young people accompanying me to do the honours. The chaplain fetched a camp-stool, found another for his wife, and we sat down on the balcony, the air being perfectly warm and free from damp. A great pyrotechnic display of summer lightning was being exhibited opposite for our benefit, lighting up the peaks, now one and now another rising suddenly to its full height, like an army obeying an inaudible word of command. I saw the little wife insinuate a hand into her husband's arm under cover of the darkness and press it with evident excitement, and once when a second flash followed the first sooner than was reasonably to be expected, plainly perceived her cuddling her pretty little bird-like head against him. I hope, however, that she was not aware of my observation.

"'Dick would like that, wouldn't he, Cyril?' she whispered.

"The chaplain made some inarticulate reply, and we were again silent, while the great aerial show went on in front of us.

"'I hope we shall have some more when he is here, don't you?' she added aloud.

"'You are expecting a friend?' I inquired, by way of encouraging conversation.

"The little chaplainess paused a moment, and though it was dark, I could feel that her face had assumed the same little expression of prim dignity I had detected at dinner time.

"'Yes, we are expecting my brother—my *only* brother,' she said in a tone intended, I think, to be politely distant, and

perhaps repressive, but which, owing to a tender tremor in the last two words, did not quite realize its intention.

"Do you expect him soon?"

"We do not quite know. He is in London now, and he says that he is getting very tired of it, and would like to get away into the mountains. He has a great many engagements, however, and cannot of course get away until he has fulfilled them—it would not be fair upon his friends. After Ascot he hopes to come. My home—I mean my brother's place—is not far from Ascot, and he always has a party of friends with him for it. This year there will be only *gentlemen*," she added with the same little air of dignity and self-importance.

"My brother-in-law is the squire of my parish," the young chaplain explained in rather abrupt tones, as if anxious to have his explanation over and have done with it—"of the parish where I am curate, and I robbed him lately of his housekeeper," he added with a laugh and a glance at his wife.

"Cyril, dear, what nonsense!" that little lady said in a tone of remonstrance.

"Well, my dear, do you mean to say that I didn't? What does your aunt, Lady Eleanor Magendie, think? That I am a wolf in sheep's clothing, pretending to be a minister of the Word in order to catch heiresses!" The young fellow gave a frank unconstrained laugh which at once confuted the accusation and made a friend of myself upon the spot.

"But the little chaplainness was evidently not pleased.

"My aunt, you know, is not a Churchwoman," she said primly. 'The Magendies are all Presbyterians.'

"And any libel of a member of the Establishment is therefore to be expected of them. Is that it, my dear? Well, it doesn't speak well for Presbyterianism, though I suppose as a good Episcopalian I ought not to complain. Anyhow, it puts the feelings of some of your relations in pretty strong relief, doesn't it?"

"Dick doesn't think so. You know that very well."

"Ah, Dick—no, not Dick; but then Dick is a Red Republican. He would have given you to any one you chose to fancy. Dick has no prejudices."

"He was still speaking when there came the sound of steps behind us, and two ladies appeared at the entrance of the little

châlet. It had grown nearly quite dark, so that they were only visible as a pair of indeterminate forms, a taller and a shorter one; feminine evidently, by the amount of cubic space they occupied and by the rustle of their garments, but as far as quality, age, beauty, or the reverse were concerned absolutely undistinguishable. We grew suddenly silent, as a small company does when it finds itself unexpectedly augmented; the chaplain lifted his hat professionally; I peered into the darkness to try and make out what they were like, and in the silence a dull rumble, like a slow procession of heavily-laden carts passing down the mountain side, made itself audible. The next minute, and while my attention was still concentrated upon the new-comers, a fresh flash, nearer, more vivid, and this time forked, darted out of the blackness, turning the range opposite into a succession of inky peaks, suffusing the sky with yellow, and lighting up the occupants of the doorway with vivid distinctness. As it did so I was startled by the beauty revealed in the face nearest to me. Eyes and skin are naturally the two points brought out strongest by such a momentary revelation, but such eyes, my dear! and such a skin! Such great dark orbs; such a lovely colour in the cheeks! You will shrug your shoulders as you always do, and say that I am indulging in one of my usual bursts of hyperbole, but even you, my good Ann, with your strong-minded-woman's contempt for so mere a trifle as feminine beauty, would have been as much startled as I was had you been sitting there, and would have been obliged to own that there are circumstances under which that contemptible quality possesses a directly stimulating, nay, thrilling effect—even upon another woman. There was not much time to see it, however, for as the light flashed and faded, the elder of the two ladies, at whom I had scarcely glanced, gave a sudden scream or squeak of dismay, and, turning, scuttled out of the *châlet* back to the hotel, her companion quickly following her.

“‘Dear me, what a splendid creature!’ I exclaimed as they vanished. ‘Who in the world is she? They were not at the *table d’hôte* surely, were they?’

“‘They are a Mrs. and Miss Misselbrook,’ the chaplain answered. ‘We thought at first they were American, but it seems they are Australian. They have taken the little *dépendance*—that one there that you can see the corner of—and have their

meals served there. I have met Miss Misselbrook several times, and she seemed intelligent, though colonial—at least I suppose colonial is the word. Some of her expressions are odd. My wife has taken rather a prejudice to her in consequence. Eh, Kitty?’ he added, glancing over with a laugh at that little lady.

“‘Indeed, indeed, Cyril, I have not taken any prejudice at all. I hope I am not in the habit of taking prejudices,’ she replied indignantly. ‘It is simply that we do not know anything about them. I am sure I never heard the name before in my life, and I must say they seem to me very—well, odd. Although you are the chaplain here, I cannot see that we are bound to make acquaintance with *every one* who happens to come to the place,’ she added in her little prim tone. ‘You called upon them after we saw them in church, and that is surely enough. There would be no end of it if we were bound to make friends with *every one*. Would there?’ she added, turning appealingly to me.

“‘Perhaps not. Though there does not seem to be any very formidable number of applicants here at present,’ I said. ‘However, so long as you make an exception in my favour I am content,’ I added laughingly.

“‘Oh! but that is *quite* different. We know *all* about you. Please, please don’t think that anything I said could possibly apply—could mean——. Only I do so dislike the idea of getting mixed up with people whom—well, whom one doesn’t feel one would get on with. If I *ought*, I will, you *know*, Cyril, if it is really, really *necessary*,’ she added, clasping her hands with the air of a small martyr who sees the rack and the thumb-screws in immediate prospect.

“‘Bless your heart, there is no ought in the matter at all that I can see, my dear Kitty. Don’t trouble your little head to do anything you don’t like,’ he answered, getting up as he spoke and offering me his hand to rise, a wind having suddenly found its way towards us from the mountains. Entering the hotel the two young people held back politely at the doorway in order to allow me to go first, and I heard the little wife whispering something eagerly into her husband’s ear, of which the word ‘Dick’ reached my own ears twice, and each time in a tone of unmistakably sisterly anxiety.

“‘And now, my dear Ann, I must to bed, to bed. If you are grateful to me for this prolonged effusion show it by writing to

me forthwith, and telling me what likelihood there is of your tearing yourself from your various tea-parties and joining me here. If I do not get a letter within a week, never expect to receive another line from your deeply offended and henceforward inflexibly silent cousin,

"ARABELLA JANE LYNCH."

[The same to the same.]

"July 9th.

"So you won't come? Not even with the prospect of laughing at what you call my insatiable gregariousness? Well, admitting that I am gregarious—what then? At my age, and under my circumstances, what would become of me if I were not so? if I could not pick up a few strands from other people's woof to weave into my own; steal, if you prefer the simile, a few younger rays to illuminate my old embers? Who was the Frenchwoman who, when asked what she lived upon, answered, 'Upon curiosity.' Well, I too live upon curiosity. Life even at its tamest and dullest is a constant entertainment to me—queer nondescript thing that it is! For the last few weeks, for instance, I have been subsisting largely on the expectation of this young Mr. Dick St. Leger's arrival. When you hear nothing day and night but the charms and excellences of a particular person, I defy you—particularly if you are a woman and an idle one—not to get up a certain amount of excitement and expectation about that person. Since that first evening I wrote you such a detailed account of, I have seen an immensity of our chaplain and his wife (their name, by the way, is Eastgood). The former I like particularly. He has enough of the parson about him to remind one that he is not a layman, without any of that insufferable sacerdotal assumption which, to my mind, is one of the least attractive features of what Douglas Jerrold called the surplice population. He is genial, he is manly, he is not at all pretentious. He is hard-working, too, I suspect, when he gets a chance, which certainly is not at a place like this, where idleness reigns supreme. His little wife, it is true, has pretensions enough, but then they are the most innocent kind possible. That she was born Miss Catherine St. Leger, and that the St. Legers of Belmont Abbey, in the county of Berkshire, are amongst the most important members of the

English untitled aristocracy, is evidently the cardinal fact of that small bundle of impressions which she calls her mind. That in marrying her curate she has abandoned that exalted sphere she evidently feels, but I will do her the justice to say that she does not seem to regret the descent. That it was a tremendous one, however, she cannot help being aware of any more than she can help secretly desiring that those she meets should be aware that in the simple chaplain's wife they behold no less a personage than the quondam mistress of Belmont Abbey and sister of that socially important personage, Richard St. Leger, Esq.

"Every day I hear more about this Richard, or Dick, his sayings and doings, his possessions and perfections. I have been shown his photograph; I know the names of his dogs and his hunters; I feel as if I had known him from earliest infancy, and had assisted at his christening. The other inmates of our Eagle I have not seen much of, with the exception of Miss Misselbrook, who, I own, interests me. The mother is a non-entity, and a vulgar one, but the girl herself is an attractive study. She likes to come to my room and to tell me about her life in Australia, which does not, somehow, give me a very exalted impression of our antipodes. Were I a man I should certainly fall in love with those eyes of hers, which if not quite so startlingly big as they appeared to be on the evening I got my first sensational glimpse of them, are still quite large enough and splendid enough, taken in connection with the rest of the face they belong to, to charm the heart out of any reasonable man's breast. What will Mr. Dick St. Leger think of them, I wonder, when he comes? Write soon.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ARABELLA JANE LYNCH.

"P.S.—The Giustiano Marconis child is better, but the rest of the brood are down with measles. Poor Polly!"

[The same to the same.]

"July 29th.

"Well, my dear Ann, at last the long-expected hero has appeared. Oh, my dear, such a disappointment! such a woeful, fearful disappointment! I don't know how to describe it to you.

If I had been a young girl myself, and had been looking forward eagerly for weeks to this all-accomplished hero's coming, I could not possibly have felt it more acutely. Really, when he first came into the room I could have cried, I was so vexed. And yet, in all respects but one, he is as nice-looking a young fellow as one could wish to see, with a fresh sunshiny face which does one good to look at, and a voice to match it, frank, eager, boyish, confiding; hair like his sister's, a yellow moustache, soft and silky, which has evidently never made acquaintance with a razor; eyes blue and widely open; a mouth, as much as one can see of it, well shaped like his sister's, though without her primness and air of small self-importance. He dresses well in a careless easy-going fashion, and is addicted to the wearing of loose tweed coats and red ties, which somehow on him do not look loud, but give that desirable touch of colour of which the modern masculine costume is so painfully devoid. He is certainly intelligent, too; quite as much so as any young man of his age need be. But—I can hear you say—if he is all this, what more did the woman expect? Did she look for a Sir Galahad or the archangel Michael himself in the person of a Berkshire squire that such an unusual catalogue of masculine merits should only produce horror and dismay? True, my dear Ann, quite true; but if you could only see him you would understand the situation at a glance. He is more, much more, than I have described, brighter, better-looking, pleasanter—but—but—there is the dreadful but coming—but he wears a great horrible sole to one of his shoes, a sole three or four inches thick at least, made of wood or cork or some such material, and this sole gives him the most dreadfully uncomfortable, top-heavy, one-sided look you can possibly imagine! If he were a wretched sickly creature all round, it would be nothing; one would understand the situation, I mean, then and make up one's mind to it; but such a bright, active, good-looking, joyous-natured youngster! It really is too cruel, too tragic! A log round the neck of a greyhound, a hawk with a string to its leg, will give you some faint idea of the anomaly of the combination. Boots like his are, of course, common enough; one sees them in the streets, but then one instinctively averts one's eyes from them, feeling it to be only charity to do so. But there is no question of averting one's eyes here. Why should any woman wish to avert her

eyes from such an embodiment of all that is well-born, well-bred, rich, and joyous, and yet I never find my own eyes resting upon him without a sense of shuddering discomfort, awakened by the sight of that terrible boot. Happily he is not conscious of it himself; at any rate not acutely so. He has made up his mind to it apparently, and accepts it with a sort of cheery philosophy which is evidently part of his nature. Even with its aid, his foot, when he is standing at ease, barely rests upon the ground. In walking he makes use of a stick which is never far from his hand. He does not carry it, however, as a lame man usually carries a stick. He twirls it airily between two fingers, raps the trunks of the trees right and left with it as he passes, flourishes it aloft in the air, and only now and then applies it to its customary use.

"He and I made friends the very first evening of our acquaintance, and he is always dropping into my sitting-room on the slightest of pretences, or no pretence at all, and settling down for a chat. I hear a quick uneven tread in the passage, a tune hummed in a loud confident voice, then a cheery rat-tat-tat-tat at my door, and in walks Mr. Dick St. Leger, looking as fresh as a daisy. I like him immensely, and yet, rather than see that boot of his, I could often find it in my heart to request him to remain outside.

"Of course, no allusion to the subject has passed between us. One day I did drop a hint of it to his sister shortly after his arrival, but was promptly snubbed by her. A pity? Did I think so? She couldn't see herself that it mattered in the least. He could do everything the same as any one else. Did I know that he was one of the best shots in Berkshire? Few people seemed even to notice now that he was lame at all. After this of course I said no more. If only one could shut one's eyes as easily as one can one's mouth! What our beauty, Miss Misselbrook, thinks on the subject is a source of no slight perplexity to me. At first her thoughts were evident enough, her face expressing not mere dismay but something like repulsion; before the end of the second day, however, it was evident to every one that the two young people had become the best friends possible. That Dick St. Leger admires the handsome Australian there can at least be no question, and he is evidently not of a nature to hide the flame of his admiration

under a bushel. 'Wasn't she a splendid girl? Wasn't she magnificent?' he used to ask me with his blue eyes wide with admiration, and his whole face glowing like a peony. He is evidently an enthusiastic and romantic young fellow, and this to me is part of his charm. To be enthusiastic and romantic at my age is natural enough, but to be romantic while you are young and curly is too much of a rarity nowadays not to be worth cherishing!

"The young people take long walks together, though how young St. Leger manages to get over the rough ground with that unlucky foot of his is a marvel to me. Bowls is the national recreation in this part of the country, and to this also they have taken keenly. His disabilities do not come against him there, and he is already, I am told, a distinguished proficient. They have even—ridiculous creatures—taken to playing at night by the light of lanterns, held by two of the superfluous hangers-on of the establishment. This evening they have been engaged in doing so upon the piece of grass immediately below my windows. I came in for quite a little scene in consequence, as you shall hear.

"Mrs. Eastgood had come into my room to borrow a leaf cutter, and we were discoursing together placidly, when a sudden shout of triumph drew us to the window. There, just below us, were the players, gathered into a knot, encircled by a ring of lookers-on, young St. Leger and Miss Misselbrook talking eagerly together, he apparently explaining something to her about the game, but his eyes lit up by a fire not entirely due, it seemed to me, to the fascinations of bowls.

"The same idea seemed to strike his sister, for she gave a sudden gasp of dismay, and grasped my arm.

"'Oh, Lady Lynch, did you see that——?'

"'See what, my dear?'

"'That dreadful girl. I know she is trying to lead Dick on. She is making up to him. We must do something. We must get him away from her.'

"'Upon my word, it seems to me, my dear, that it is your brother Dick who is making up to that girl,' I said. 'Surely you must have noticed how very attentive he has been to her of late?'

"'Oh no, no, indeed, I'm sure it must be all her. I'm sure he wouldn't think of such a thing.'

"'Why not? Probably he has fallen in love with her.'

"'In love! Oh, Lady Lynch, he mustn't, mustn't fall in love with her. Why, he might want next to *marry* her. A girl we know nothing about, whom no one in the county knows anything about. An Australian! I have always heard colonists are *so* objectionable. Oh, it is perfectly dreadful. What shall we do? What shall we do? I must do something.'

"'Upon my word, my dear, you seem to forget that you have married for love yourself if it comes to that,' I said rather tartly, for I did not at all enjoy the prospect of having my little romance cut short.

"'I? Oh, but that was so different. Besides, we always knew all about Cyril from the beginning. Where is Cyril? I must go to him. I must ask him——'

"And off she ran to consult her parson. Post time.

"Ever your affectionate cousin,

"ARABELLA JANE LYNCH."

[The same to the same.]

"August 10th, 8.30 a.m.

"Such an excitement, my dear Ann, since I wrote last! However, I must begin properly at the beginning or you will never understand.

"I must tell you that ever since I have been at Gebenstal I have been intending to visit a lake, of which all the visitors, the German ones particularly, rave, and out of which come the excellent little trout which form the best item of the fare which our Eagle sets before us. Yesterday afternoon, feeling more energetically disposed than usual, I decided to undertake the walk. None of my young friends were visible when I sallied forth from the hotel, so I decided to proceed alone. It was an afternoon of unaccountable temper, at one moment calm and serene, at another breaking out into unaccountable little gusts of wind, accompanied with distant mutterings of thunder. After leaving the valley of Gebenstal one finds oneself almost immediately under the shadow of the mountains. The

rocks rose high above my head, higher, higher, higher, more like great sea cliffs than the usual sloping base of mountains. Sea cliffs, you must understand, four thousand, in some places five thousand feet high, the sort of sea cliffs which may exist in Saturn or Jupiter, if either of those superior planets possess oceans, but which certainly are not to be found upon this little ball of ours. Well, to continue, on I went, up and up, deeper and deeper into the ravine, which seemed to close in around me like some enchanted valley which forbade any future exit, the trees, too, shutting in the pathway, so that I could with difficulty push on. At last I came to the lake. Such a lake, my dear! In the centre of this tremendous gorge, inclosed and overlooked by this tremendous circumvallation of cliffs, lay—a pool, a puddle, a mere miserable little duck pond. It was such a lake as might have been made in any suburban paddock after a couple of nights' rain! I positively stood still and laughed, so ridiculous was the contrast between what I saw and what my imagination had previously conjured up. There were the fish, however, unmistakably, flopping about and whisking their tails derisively. Of course they had been put in by the landlord of the hotel, whose property the lake is, and whose guests entertain themselves by fishing in it. There was even a little house into which they—the guests, I mean, not the fish—could retire from the rain. I wondered that there was not a boat to row about in, though if there had been its prow would have touched the further bank while its helm still rested upon the nearer one! Being somewhat tired with my walk I went into the little house and sat down on a bench to rest myself. It was very warm and still, and sleepifying, and I suppose I must have gradually lapsed off into a doze, for I fancied that I was in a boat—that boat whose absence I had wondered at—and that in it were two other people besides myself whose voices I was listening to, and that one of the two was asking for something which the other declined to give, whereupon the first threatened to leap into the water. This effectually aroused me, and I found myself with my head jammed close against one of the wooden sides of the hut, and my bonnet pushed woefully out of shape. The voices were not imaginary, however, for I could hear them still going on somewhere not very far away. I was upon the point of getting up and going to the entrance, when my eye

was attracted to a little square aperture in the woodwork, through which I beheld what for the moment arrested my movement, namely, two faces—those of Miss Misselbrook and young St. Leger—reflected below me in the placid surface. There was nothing placid in the faces themselves, however. Both looked excited, young St. Leger flushed and angry, the girl had her dark eyes fixed with a resolute look upon the water. Evidently while I had slept there had been a scene. I was still looking when the young fellow suddenly turned away with a gesture of anger and mortification, turned sharp off to the right, and hurried as fast as he could down the path, quickly disappearing in the intricacies of the wood. The girl remained where she was for a moment, then sprang forward as if to stop him, and also immediately vanished among the trees. From the time I awoke to the time when they had both disappeared there could hardly have been three minutes.

I remained where I was for perhaps a quarter of an hour longer, thinking over what I had seen. Then I too followed in the same direction. If Miss Misselbrook intended to catch up her swain she had certainly not succeeded, for when I got through the wood and came out upon the open meadows beyond I could see her a good long way ahead of me walking alone in the direction of the hotel. A mist was beginning to rise and the mutterings of thunder had got louder. Before I was able to reach the hotel the mist had changed to rain, and there was every sign that a storm was brooding.

"I was a little late at the *table d'hôte*, as I had to change from head to foot, and when I got down I found that every one had assembled with the exception of young St. Leger, whose place between myself and Miss Misselbrook stood conspicuously empty. I cannot say I was surprised, for after what I had seen beside the lake it did not seem very likely that he would present himself immediately. His sister, however, was both surprised and disturbed, and kept up a ceaseless comment of wonder as to where he was and why he had remained out in the rain instead of coming to dinner. By the time that meal was over, the rain had become a downpour, and the claps of thunder followed one another almost without an interval; the fog, too, had thickened and there was every prospect of it getting worse as the night wore on. The poor little chaplainess was in a most distracted

state, running up and down the house, gazing out of every window, wringing her hands and declaring again and again that it was all the fault of that horrid girl; she must have frightened him into running away. He didn't know of any other way of escaping from her! I kept my opinion to myself, though privately I must own I was also somewhat alarmed at his non-appearance. We sat up, the chaplain and chaplainess and I, till about twelve o'clock, but at last we went to bed, for what else was there to do, seeing that none of us had an idea where he was?

"I slept at first, but after a while I awakened. A moon had risen, and through a gap in the curtain which Perkins had pinned over the window I could see a corner of one of the mountains, cold, naked and desolate-looking, encircled with dense masses of white fog which seemed clutching at it with fleecy fingers. I thought of young St. Leger, and shuddered at the possibility of his being stuck in some such place with that wretched foot of his, unable to get down, and calling, calling, vainly perhaps, for aid. The idea took such possession of me that presently I got up, wrapped a dressing-gown around me and went to the window. The rain had ceased, but the fog lay thick over the valley, covering the sides of the mountains, filling all the defiles and leaving here and there only a topmost peak visible. The path which led away from the hotel, and which I had followed the day before, was so obscured that the eye could only follow it a few yards away from the hotel. My eyes were fixed upon it when all at once it seemed to me that I saw something stirring, an indistinct white object moving along rapidly towards me. Another moment the fog divided, and to my intense astonishment I saw Miss Misselbrook coming out of the midst of it, flying rather, towards the house.

"Flinging open my window and leaning out I called to her by name.

"She stopped and looked up.

"Who is there? Lady Lynch! Thank goodness somebody is awake. He is up there. I heard him call from my window—an Australian coo-ey—it could be no one else. I dressed and ran out, but the fog is too thick. We must get lanterns. Call the others, please. Quick, quick!"

"I did not wait to hear more. I left the window, I flew to

the Eastgoods' room, which was opposite mine, and roused them, telling them that Dick was in the mountains, that they must go up to him with lanterns.

"In a minute every one was stirring. The chaplain came rushing along the passage in most un-parsonic attire, ran down-stairs, and tugged away at the big bell that hangs at the gate. Soon lights were burning in every direction; all the hangers-on and half the guests of the establishment rushing out like ants suddenly disturbed. I put on a shawl and went down to the little *châlet* before described, which commands an uninterrupted view of the mountains. Some one was already standing there, a dark form with big gleaming eyes. I marched straight up to her and took her by the arm.

"'Will you answer me one question, Miss Misselbrook?' said I. Then without waiting for her to reply: 'What did you say to Dick St. Leger this afternoon by the lake, may I inquire?' I asked sternly.

'She started. 'How do you know . . . How——?'

"'Never mind how I know. What did you say to him, that is the question?'

"'He asked me to—to——'

"'To marry him—yes—yes—and you said——'

"'I said that I would, only that—that——'

"'That you didn't like his boot. Was that it?'

"'Ye—es.'

"'I thought as much. Do you suppose that he likes it himself?'

"'Of course not. But——'

"I did not wait for the rest of her explanation, but marched straight back to the hotel. I am very angry with her, the more so because to a great extent I sympathize. She feels as I feel, only I suppose more so. She likes him; I am sure she likes him; I believe she is in love with him; but she cannot make up her mind to—to put it coarsely—swallow his boot! I don't know, to tell the truth, that I could myself if I were a girl. And yet—I don't know. I am not sure. He is a dear fellow. Anyhow I wish with all my heart he would come back. This suspense is beginning to"

[The same to the same.]

" Postscript, 5 p.m.

" This suspense, I was about to say, my dear Ann, was really beginning to be more than human flesh and blood could bear. Every one had left the hotel ; the Eastgoods, the landlord, the guides, the hangers-on of all sorts, even a considerable proportion of the guests. Miss Misselbrook, too, had disappeared, though she certainly did not go with the rest of the search party. I told myself that it was ridiculous for me to go. Far better remain and occupy myself intelligently until they returned. It was all very well, but it was impossible—impossible to read, impossible to write, impossible to do anything but put on my clogs and scuttle after the others. By this time it was broad daylight ; the sun had dispersed the mists, which still hung in ragged shreds about the base of the mountains, or floated like masses of gossamer along the steaming streaming edges of the valley. The others, I knew, had taken the direct way to the mountains. It was too steep for me, so I pursued the less perpendicular path, which led me along the edge of the stream up into the pine woods, and so up and up and up. How people ever become Alpine climbers is more, I own, than I can imagine. Do their hearts feel as if they were somewhere on the tops of their shoulders, and their lungs as if they were full of pins and needles, I wonder? Mine did on that occasion I know. I walked till I could literally walk no further. I was tired to death, and began to ask myself why I had been such a fool as to come. If the rest of the party with their ropes and their axes, their good legs and good lungs, had been unable all this time to find him, what likelihood was there of my doing so? I looked about for somewhere to rest, but not a spot could I find. Everything was soaking from the rain of the night before ; the very stones were steaming ; no one with the fear of rheumatism before their eyes could have ventured to seat themselves anywhere. I struggled on accordingly a little further, until I came to a place where the path forked, the wider part of it pointing straight up hill through the trees, the narrower less-frequented one leading away to the right where some huge blocks of stone gaped a little, and between which the path

ran. I remembered that there had been some talk of a cave in this direction, so concluded that what I saw before me was the entrance to it. Probably the rain had not penetrated in there, so that if I got in I might find somewhere to sit down, I thought, without actually imperilling my life. The entrance was very narrow, but I wriggled through as best I could dislodging a shower of small stones as I did so, some of which fell upon my feet and hurt considerably. I fancied I heard a sound of voices, but was too much occupied to pay any attention until I suddenly doubled the next angle of the winding pathway, when I stood still, petrified with astonishment. There, twenty yards ahead of me, stood the cause of all our anxieties, and with him, leaning against the wall of the cavern—Miss Misselbrook.

"I stood rooted to the ground. How had they got there? Had he found a shelter in that asylum during the night? When had she discovered him? Above all what, oh what, oh what would my little friend Mrs. Eastgood say?

"They were so occupied with one another that at first they remained utterly unconscious of my presence. Young St. Leger was the first to perceive me. With a start and a blush which made his foolish young face as red as a poppy, he came hobbling briskly towards me, his eyes literally leaping out of his head with excitement. And his first words were—well, what do you suppose they were? Come, guess! You don't care, you say; these people and their tiresome concerns are nothing to you. Oh, very well, if you don't care you shan't know. Good-bye.

"Your affectionate cousin,

;
"ARABELLA JANE LYNCH."

"My Trio."

By MARY HAMPDEN.

LORD HARRY LONGACRES' letter to me contained one passage of overwhelming interest, which ran as follows :

"Dear girl, I am convinced you and I could pull along famously together. If you think so too say 'Yes,' and you'll make me no end happy."

Sir Dorin D'Estcourt wrote less expressively, but his calligraphy was so handsome and the sentences were so neatly turned ! I quote an example :

"Now we have met, I feel that my existence can never be the same in your absence. Town is no longer interesting ; society palls because you are away. My dear Miss Allardyce, will you accept my devotion and bestow on me the treasure of your regard ?"

And then there remained one other letter—so short—from Cuthbert Banistor Bemmering, M.P. for Polltown :

"Regret missing you at Mrs. L——'s, but as you have left town, I have no alternative but to make my proposition through the post. I trust you are aware of my sentiments as regards yourself, so it only remains for me to ask you—Will you be my wife ?"

I am always frank, so I say at once that I liked those letters ; they represented the affection—true and sensible—of three nice men ; and a girl means so much by the word "nice !" They would none of them be inconsolable ; they were one and all thoroughly in earnest. Now could there have been more satisfactory lovers ?

At the time when I received those letters the season was over—my first season in town. But it must not be imagined that I was young—not at all ; my father had been ten years in India, and I had passed through my schooldays only to take up a more severe course of study. It is a fact that I did not go to my first ball until I was twenty-seven ; but then I was B.A. of

Dublin University, had studied art in Rome, and—— Well, I will not make out a list of my attainments; suffice it to say I knew myself to be tolerably educated, an heiress and a beauty!

I hope no one will be shocked by this confession, for I never heard that one should be ashamed of good looks, and I could not help knowing of mine, for every one complimented me, and no one oftener than my dear old father. "Dorothy, you look positively lovely to-night." "My darling, you're pretty enough to make sunshine on a dull day." These were the sweet speeches he made me by the hour, and I don't think they made me vain—on the contrary, I forgot about my own appearance because I had no need to remember it.

Some girls might have fancied that those letters had been dictated by mercenary motives, but I never had the least fear on the subject. It is a theory of mine that the unpleasant people of the world are on the surface, clearly visible to the careful eye, but the good lie hidden in the deep pools and need to be searched for. That is why so many cynics flourish in society, because they teach merely superficial opinions of humanity, and their lazy listeners are pleased to adopt their notion that all are alike bad, because it saves the trouble of discrimination.

I knew my three gentlemen, at least, were true-hearted and honourable. Perhaps I had better describe them in a few words.

Lord Harry Longacres was a great merry sportsman. He always looked lost in a ball-room, because he had to part with "Bolt," an untidy, long-eared water spaniel, who was his constant companion; but he was seen at his best in the Row, riding an immense roan and followed by quite half-a-dozen dogs of different sizes. On such occasions he dressed in light colours—grey usually—his face appearing ruddy by contrast, his overhanging moustache a cheerful auburn.

Sir Dorin D'Estcourt was tall and thin; a nervous, fair-haired man, with solemn grey eyes, a habit of constantly stroking the fringe on his upper lip, and a hesitating manner. He was capable of making very graceful speeches, but always required to think them out first; and as he never smiled or varied his expression of polite boredom, it was difficult to understand how much or how little he was meaning.

Mr. Banistor Bemmering was a different man to either of the others. For him life was a series of contested elections, where

good fortune came out at the head of the poll only in response to energetic wire-pulling. He disliked most sports, objected to racing on principle, wore severely plain clothes, and was never known to indulge in a flower in his button-hole. He affected the dress and bearing of an earlier period — old-fashioned, sombre, but distinguished. Lord Harry was thirty-five, Sir Dorin barely thirty, but Mr. Bemmering was at least forty. A rising young politician, his friends called him, and after the manner of political men, he thought himself a great celebrity. His opinions, when he gave them, were in good taste and definite; his approval was hard to win by either man or woman, so I felt flattered to have gained it; and the epithet by which he expressed dislike to any one or anything was "trying." I heard him speak once in the House, and he described the conduct of honourable gentlemen opposite as "trying," and the mild rebuke called forth many a wince which a stronger word would not have provoked. I need only add that his face had an unmistakably legal air of reserve—he spoke so little, and he knew so much!

As soon as I had read and considered those letters, which, strange to say, all arrived on the same day, I took them to my father to ask his opinion. I found him sitting bareheaded on a garden seat, enjoying the sunshine and smoking his favourite meerschaum. We had no estate in England, but had taken Deep Dale Abbey at my request. It was a regular old ruin, five miles from the station, and hidden from a road which nobody traversed by a belt of lime and alder trees.

"Which of these men do you love, Dorothy, darling?"

"Daddy," I cried, "I've only met them in the gay and giddy throng, and I don't know. I'm greatly touched by the reflection that they care for me, and I do think it wouldn't be right to refuse any one of them!"

"I should have thought that was rather awkward, but you are so clever. What is the use of asking me?"

"Because I like to tell you everything. Dad, I can't accept any man's offer until I am sure that he is more than a capital waltzer or a first-rate amateur actor; even playing the banjo is not sufficient to my mind. My idea of a husband is one who would be happy at home, who could occupy himself in leisure minutes with some other interest than the everlasting billiards

and cigars. No, don't put out your pipe, you foolish old dear; you have worked all your life, and now you have a right to smoke. But do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so, Dora. But what are you going to do?"

"I have a plan. You must ask them all three down here, where there is no shooting or fishing, five miles from a village, the post and the morning papers always late, and no one to call upon. Then, dad, there'll be a fine chance to find out whether their tempers are good, whether they are companionable and have nice domesticated ways."

My father let his pipe fall, he was so much surprised at my proposition; then at last he murmured admiringly:

"Dorothy, you are a wonderful girl! What a plan! No one but you would have thought of it. But there is just one question: when you choose, what shall I do with the two left? I don't want them to accuse you of having broken their hearts."

"Oh, daddy, I shall be on the watch. I won't let any of them do that. You will write to them all for me that I do not feel able to reply definitely at once, then your invitation follows."

"You come and tell me what to say, dear."

Between us we soon finished the three short letters: with the exception of the names and addresses they were all exactly alike.

Needless to say the gentlemen each agreed to come for a visit, and I must own to feeling rather excited on the day of their arrival.

Such a day it was too. Rain, rain, nothing but rain. Overhead a leaden sky; underfoot, mud, country mud. The road from the station was bowered by branches; these were dripping. The ruinous old house was enveloped in a damp fog, and there was not one cheerful object in the landscape. I really pitied the three travellers. Deep Dale Abbey did not look inviting on this occasion.

Lord Harry was the first to arrive. He came in the morning, and seemed positively cheerful; it was quite a relief to hear his hearty voice.

"How d'you do, Miss Allardyce? How are you, colonel? By Jove, that little mare of yours went like the wind."

When he had an opportunity to speak to me alone he took both my hands and gave them an energetic squeeze.

"So you couldn't make up your mind to take me. Well, I don't know that I'm surprised, but if you ever like me well enough I shall be a lucky fellow. I'm not going to bore you while I'm here, but we'll be jolly good friends, won't we? And if only this confounded rain will hold up to-morrow we'll go a canter round the country."

Sir Dorin D'Estcourt came in the afternoon, in time for dinner. I thought he looked at me a little reproachfully, but it may have been my fancy. He too held my hand for several minutes, but I did not think much of that because I knew he was preparing a pretty speech.

"I hoped I might come to meet a welcome even more charming than the one you have accorded me, Miss Allardyce, but a man always finds satisfaction in bowing before a lady's wishes. If you want time to reflect over my proposal, Heaven forbid that I should try to hurry you."

That was very nice of him, I thought; and he really did look mournful.

Mr. Banistor Bemmering arrived late in the evening.

"My dear Miss Allardyce," he exclaimed, "I would have come earlier, but public business prevented me. With your kind indulgence I will address you on a subject which is very near my heart. I am to understand that you do not reject me?"

"I cannot answer you yet," I replied, "but I will do so as soon as I am able."

"Thank you. At the earliest possible opportunity. While regretting that circumstances should have arisen which——"

But no need to repeat his remarks. Mr. Bemmering had resumed his parliamentary manner, and delivered a very wordy, if not a mighty, speech; he had learned in a good school how to cover an awkward situation with respectable phrases.

I really think the Clerk of the Weather must have been in sympathy with my plot. It rained; oh, how it did rain. The first day Lord Harry spent most of his time in the stables; Mr. Bemmering wrote a political essay in the library; Sir Dorin wound a skein of wool for me, and then did nothing. But it was too soon to do more than observe; I formed no conclusions.

Then came Sunday. I saw that they went to church, but when we had driven home they all wore long faces.

However, it was so wet that I forgave them.

We sat in the drawing-room and talked. Lord Harry recounted his adventures in last year's hunting fields; Sir Dorin propounded a bad joke now and again, which had the effect of making him very grave; and Mr. Bemmering discussed the tithes question at great length. I contrived to get him into a debate, but he argued so sweetly that he seemed scarcely to care which side won.

So the week passed. Of course there were some fine days, and we rode, walked and drove, but in the intervals the gentlemen had to be content with scant amusement. An occasional rubber at whist was the only recreation we tolerated, father and I.

They must have been dreadfully bored; but, to do them justice, they tried their best not to show it; so when a fortnight had elapsed I determined to bring matters to a crisis by a leading question.

It was another wet day, about the tenth out of fourteen, without a glimmer of sunlight, and finding Lord Harry looking disconsolately out of window, I asked carelessly:

"What are you thinking of doing this evening?"

"I can't imagine!"

"The hours pass rather slowly, don't you think they do?"

"Yes, indeed," he answered hastily; "there is never anything to be done this wretched weather—— I have an idea I'd better be off, Miss Allardyce. I'm awfully sorry, but I don't think I can please you; I haven't got a lot of intellect, you know."

"And you find life stupid in a dull country house?"

"I could never find any place stupid where you were—by Jove, I couldn't."

But I was satisfied that *his* heart would not break at any rate, so I let him go.

I could not feel very angry with Sir Dorin, because, although he wore a doleful do-nothing air, he bore with the weather most patiently.

"I'd just as soon be indoors as out; while we have the pleasure of your society all surroundings are alike to me," he replied, in answer to my inquiries.

I had grown to like Sir Dorin since his arrival at Deep Dale Abbey; he was always gentle, considerate, and impressed me with a good opinion of his temper.

He did not make a noticeable figure in society, for his retiring

disposition allowed him to get lost in a manner which had prevented us from being better friends; but in a lonely drawing-room on a wet day he was a satisfactory conversationalist so long as he had the field to himself. When the other gentlemen entered he relapsed into silence, or merely added a word here and there to their discussions.

"Have you made up your mind yet, Dorothy, darling?" my dear old father asked me next morning. "Lord Harry has gone, and Sir Dorin is going, so I suppose the choice falls on Cuthbert Bemmering?"

"Sir Dorin going?" I exclaimed in a voice of dismay. "The deceitful man. Just as I had begun to fancy his quiet ways. Daddy, they are all alike, selfish to a degree. Yes, I believe the politician has come first through the ordeal; but then he would always be happy if he were allowed to air his opinions, and when he is silent I know he is only preparing his next address to his constituents. Where is Sir Dorin going?—and when?"

"I think he must have gone, Dorothy. He sent me word quite early that he was running up to town for a day or two, but hopes to return here."

Town! The old story! He could not be contented in a picturesque romantic spot like Deadwold! He could not relinquish his club even for a fortnight! My conscience reproached me a little when I remembered the weather, and looked out of the window upon another soaking dreary day, but I determined to be very cold and distant with Sir Dorin if he returned. Mr. Bemmering was the last of my trio, and even he deserted me.

"Public business" called him away at once, and when he remarked dogmatically, "I am convinced, Miss Allardyce, that it is a fatal mistake for any man to refuse to recognize defeat; I fear you are not willing to entertain my offer," I did not think that he, either, was broken-hearted.

My dear old father was very patient with me when we were left alone together. I did have a foolish cry, though I did not know what it was about then.

"Daddy, you are the nicest man in the world," I cried, "and we will never be parted—never!"

Deep Dale Abbey looked so much better after one day's sunshine. The paths had been swept and rolled, the laurels

trimmed, and there was quite a wealth of flowers in the garden. I felt sorry the old place had been so dreary when my trio of guests had seen it. True, Sir Dorin D'Estcourt returned with the sunshine, but he did not deserve to witness the improvement.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to town," I said icily. "How is everything looking, and what is the news?"

"I only passed through on my way to Dorin Hall; I did not stay to see or hear anything. As I told you in my letter, Miss Allardyce, society palls in your absence."

"You did not find Deep Dale enlivening. You were obliged to fly from it for relaxation."

"I went to fetch this. Do you remember when I told of the white sapphire which had been in our family for ages, you told me you had never seen one? May I venture to hope that you will honour me by accepting it?"

I took the ring in my hand and turned it about, ostensibly to admire the beautiful gem, but in reality I was thinking of the giver.

How could I have doubted him? How could I ever have thought his face had only one expression of polite boredom? As I glanced timidly up into his eyes, I found them very eloquent.

"You have not repented of your letter then, Sir Dorin?"

"No, Miss Allardyce, I shall never do that."

"You have not been very dull this last fortnight?"

"I have been anxious—that was all. I could always be fond of home life if you were its presiding genius. I would do my best to understand art, literature, and music for your sake, and I know you would try to take a little interest in my less intellectual recreations. Will you let me place my ring upon your finger, Dorothy?"

"Yes," I answered. "I feel now that I have been too exacting. I will not ask you to spend hours watching the rain through drawing-room windows, Sir Dorin!"

* * * * *

"So you've learned to love one of your three suitors, darling?" said my father when I told him all about it. "I'm very glad to hear it, for Sir Dorin is the best of the trio!"

And I agreed to his opinion like a dutiful daughter.

Winter Shadows.

By W. W. FENN.

WITH daylight at a premium for a month or two, and with the shadow of winter enfolding these northern latitudes in its solemn pall, one is forcibly reminded of Scott's lines—

“When dark December glooms the day,
And takes our autumn joys away ;
When short and scant the sunbeam throws
Upon the weary waste of snows
A cold and profitless regard,
Like patron on a needy bard ;”—

for it is thus that the great Magician of the North sounds the keynote of the situation.

If the actual month of December be not always with us, and we are not always visited with a snowfall when the days are actually at their very shortest, it makes little difference to the sentiment of the period. Deep winter time brings enough climatic unpleasantness to be covered by the poetic description. The poet's lines go on, of course, to point the contrast which the interior of our dwellings affords to the gloomy aspect of the skies, and things generally beyond four walls. Whether in town or country, it is mainly the season for indoors, and the picture the poet conjures up of a sportsman's snug parlour is, again, equally applicable in its sentiment to what everybody feels. It signifies little how our own immediate surroundings may differ from those of the country gentleman ; we can descry in the details of his abode precisely those domestic instincts which animate us all. To adopt, for instance, as strong a contrast as may be, we should find in the lady's *boudoir* under similar circumstances the same atmosphere of thought and sensation, the same love of home with its warmth and comfort, the same inclination to employ our minds and hands with anything which can be done indoors. “Guns, fishing rods, and spears,” may not decorate our walls, rough terriers and sporting dogs may not

cumber our hearth, even as we say snow may not impede our communications with the outer world, but we find the equivalents for these details in some shape or other. Pictures, busts, knick-knacks, and objects of art generally, supply the place of the sportsman's gear; the purring puss-cat, or the comical pug, represent pretty forcibly the sentiment of pets and the friends which man delights to find in so-called dumb creatures; possibly we have the actual counterpart of the steed in his stall eating his head off. The spirit of these things is present with the additional advantages which modern progress has put at our command since the days when the Master of Abbotsford wrote the introduction to the fifth canto of "Marmion."

There is no necessity now for our "conning o'er the newspaper" more than once for lack of fresh intelligence as he describes, nor is the post usually long delayed by any stress of weather. The water companies have effectually prevented any need for turning out to the spring, and housewives are in a measure not dependent for their supplies upon "snow-impered wains." Hence there is no difference in the regard we pay to the allurements of home. Still, winter-time out of doors to the robust or even fairly healthy has plenty of attractions, and as an able writer on social topics has said when referring to the season in town, "If the weather prove really 'seasonable,' it is in sympathy with English constitutions and tastes. Bright, crisp frost raises the spirits, and sets the blood in healthier circulation by provoking brisk exercise. Nor does London ever look much better than when, in a dry clear December, its noble thoroughfares are thronged with people and such a procession of equipages as astonishes our visitors from abroad. It is a season of social activity, of gaiety of all kinds, and cordial Christmas observances."

Naturally, the medal has its reverse, and when that reverse is unduly prolonged, as is too frequently the case, there will be considerable grumbling heard, even indoors, whatever are the attractions to be found there. Being Britons, this must be the case, of course; but when the fit of discontent has passed, no harm is done, and the best way to put a check upon it is to try and remember what rare spells of lovely weather are often vouchsafed to us far into the autumn. Meanwhile, if we are obliged to remain at home day after day through stress of weather—and a good many of us would look upon such a fate as far from a hard-

ship, by the way—why, there is in London not a little amusement to be had from the moving panorama in the streets on a wet or snowy day. Given a favourable situation for our house, and supposing we are inclined to diversify our indoor occupations by an occasional idle for ten minutes by looking out of window, there are sights constantly presenting themselves from which many lessons may be extracted. From a comfortable corner on the window seat we may, as from a private box at the play, observe the exciting drama of life, having all our emotions stirred in their turn. Nowhere can we get a more comprehensive view of the curious and amusing spectacle. Albeit the leading feature of it appears at the first blush to be commonplace, and to exhibit chiefly the shifts and expedients mankind resorts to when in contention with the hostility of the elements, there is a good deal more to be seen, if we look below the surface. For the moment, no doubt, it seems men and women alike are possessed by one dominating desire. But in reality there is much more. How not to get wet is the problem they are all bent on solving, save some few who have given it up as hopeless, and go about taking apparently no more heed of the drenching rain than they would of a buzzing fly or two. These, the forlorn and miserable for the most part, recognize the impossibility of keeping dry under the circumstances of their “looped and windowed raggedness.” Thus pathos and humour at once tread fast upon each other’s heels, whilst stern worldly indifference passes on, regardless of either. Not unfrequently our hearts may be wrung by the sight of some poor ill-clad workwoman, perhaps with a baby nestling in her bosom, wending her way through the jostling indifferent crowd; her flimsy, meagre shawl, insufficient at the best to protect herself, drawn to its utmost stretch across her tender charge. Wet through she must be we know, for she has no umbrella, as of course also must be the little chap clinging to her skirts and struggling at a trot by her side. Our deepest pity goes forth to her even as we watch her from a distance, but when she is near enough, and we catch a hurried glimpse of that pale, pinched, careworn face, we are almost impelled to open the window and call after her to come inside and dry herself and have something to eat. But she is gone in a moment—the great seething sea of humanity has swallowed her up, even as the mighty ocean would a “waif and stray” piece of wreckage, for verily is she not one in

the bitterest sense of the term?—battered, splintered fragment from the great ship of life?—thrown overboard, cast away, and if not actually doomed to sink immediately, yet we feel that this can only be a question of time. Down she must go, if one can so speak of anything which has never been “up.”

When the shadows of winter fall on such too frequent sights in the thoroughfares of London, they become additionally pathetic, and were it not that the comic element of the streets is for ever inextricably woven in with the sadder hues, we could hardly bear to linger at the window with any idea of being diverted by the significant panorama passing before us. Indeed, as it is, we have idled there sufficiently for to-day, and had better return to our “books and work, and healthful play.” Imprisonment within doors may, however, become less irksome to us since our glimpse of life outside, in which case time will not have been entirely wasted. In this respect, a residence in town has its advantages; for albeit the country offers many an enchanting prospect during sunny hours in winter, yet these are so brief and rare, and the preponderance of gloom and shadow is so great, that there is little hope of the home-imprisoned finding relief even by a passing glance beyond the threshold.

My Love of a Dear.

I LOVED her through a summer bright,
As summers were of old ;
Through a winter that without her
Had dreary seemed and cold.
I loved her for her perfect form,
Her lovely head and face ;
Above all, perhaps, I loved her
For her courage and her grace.

I loved the shapely limbs that told
The secret of her sire ;
Those large, full sparkling eyes that spoke
Of gentleness and—fire !
She trod the earth as tho' she were
The " Lady of the Land "—
My " Gladys ! " formed to win all hearts,
And, when " won," to " command."

She ran away with me at last,
She took the fateful leap,
Which many a strong man shudders at,
Which makes weak woman weep.
I ceased to love her quite as well,
For all her beauty rare,
When she nearly killed me at the bank
My lovely chestnut mare !

ANNIE THOMAS.

A Buried Sin.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER OF KENT HOUSE.

KENT HOUSE had only been built a few years, and still looked brand-new from attic to basement. It was massive, square, and strong ; some people said it was like a cubic piece cut off from a barrack ; others, when speaking to the owner and wishing to combine truth with compliment, called it a fine, solid, substantial place, and the local paper described it as "Mr. Kent's elegant mansion"—all of which epithets were pleasing in the owner's ears. It stood on the hillside, and enjoyed an extensive view of hill and valley, well-wooded home-scenery, for miles around. It was built of the brightest of red brick, picked out with white, and had large plate-glass windows, and mostly white blinds ; the general effect on a sunny summer day was really dazzling. The master of the house, Mr. Kent, was his own architect, and he had resolved that Kent House should be large, light and airy. He did not care for architectural ornament, or what he called "spidery twisting and twirling decorations with no sense in 'em." He considered turrets affected and gables a sheer waste of space ; he liked everything solid, strong and lasting—and so he had it !

The windows on the ground floor opened out to a wide terrace walk, with steps leading down across the smooth lawn, beyond which lay the garden, which was laid out in what seemed to be wild confusion, though in reality it was carefully planned according to the taste of its owner. He who supplied the sinews of war thought he had a right to arrange the campaign according to his own fashion, and he didn't see why fruits and flowers shouldn't grow together ; he was used to having his own way and determined to throw them into close companionship. A currant bush was as good as a rose tree—better, for it was more useful ; so the kitchen, the flower garden and the orchard were mixed together in what appeared to be "most admired confusion," and presented a novel though by no means unpleasant picture. It is

true, the mixing together of this ungenial family had its drawbacks ; the lily objected to its neighbour the gooseberry bush ; the crimson roses paled and faded in the shadow of a row of plum trees ; and the white apple blossoms lay like a shroud of snow upon a world of tender buds before they had strength to blow. So, in the struggle for life, one killed the other. It was like the bringing together of an antagonistic human family and expecting them to bear the flower of peace. Well, Mr. Kent drove his gardeners mad and wasted his money, but that was his business. When one of his floral family failed he planted another, determined to force his fancy till he won success.

The furniture of the house was as heavy as its architecture ; the æsthetic goddess of grace fled from it in despair. There were capacious sofas, easy chairs in plenty, all upholstered in bright crimson velvet, and heavy curtains to the windows ; nothing light or airy anywhere. "The world must take me as they find me," the master of the house used to say ; "I like comfort, a fig for ornament and show !" It never struck his enlightened mind that he might combine the two. The waste of money and want of taste shocked the feelings of the more cultivated, but as he was rich and hospitable they accepted him all the same.

Reginald Kent was one of the family of self-made men, and by sheer pluck, shrewdness, and energy had fought his way while yet in the early prime of life to the top of the ladder, whereon he now triumphantly stood. From being an employé in the factory about four miles distant he had climbed into the favour of his master, who being an old man gradually dropped out of the business, left Mr. Kent as overseer, then took him into partnership, and in the end died and left him master of the concern. Kent had good business faculties, he had also good luck, indeed it might be said that everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

In the library, surrounded by tall oak bookcases filled with handsomely-bound books that were never read, sat Mrs. Kent, mother of the master of the house. She was knitting a pair of socks for her son, the chief days of her life being occupied in supplying her Reginald with this necessary article of his attire. At the present moment she had a thought above stockings, she had let her folded hands fall into her lap, and was gazing out upon the landscape with eyes that saw not. Although she was far beyond the prime of life, she looked considerably younger

than her years. Her hair was only slightly tinged with grey, her eyes were as bright as ever, and her complexion as ruddy as an apple, but there was a somewhat hard look about her mouth, a restless anxiety in her eye. She looked as though she had gone through a world of trouble before she reached her present pinnacle of greatness and could wear rustling silks and a gold chain about her neck as thick as her little finger. Her reverie was broken by the entrance of her son. He came into the room like the breezy breath of a strong north-easter, his ruddy countenance clothed in smiles, his limbs sheathed in a brand-new suit of tweeds of a large plaid pattern, of which gold and green were the dominant colours; not, perhaps, the most becoming costume, as like Hamlet he was "fat, and scant of breath."

"Didn't expect to see me, mother, eh?" he said, in answer to her inquiring look.

"No, indeed," she answered; "it isn't like you to take two holidays in one week."

"No. I think I do apply myself too much to business," he answered, pleased that she should note the fact.

"But remember," she added, "the eye of the master doeth more than the hand of the servant."

"That's true," he rejoined; "but the most wide-awake master must indulge in forty winks sometimes."

"Ah! Regy; if *you* would only wink in the right direction!" she said, shaking her head with a deprecating look.

"Yes, but the right direction for one is the wrong direction for another. I don't think we two should ever agree on that point."

"I suppose you are going down to the Blaines'?"

"You suppose right," he answered, and there was a sort of covert defiance in his tone; "there's another tennis party on."

"Well," she observed suspiciously, "I think—but of course they have an object in it—they always seem to be having tennis parties!"

"Never one too many, mother," he replied; "to my mind, they don't come round often enough."

"Humph!" she said, with an aggravating look and accent which jarred upon his not over-sensitive nerves.

"I think I'm very well able to paddle my own canoe," he said, in answer to her unuttered thought

"The cleverest sometimes paddle into muddy waters."

"I've kept pretty well in mid-stream so far," he answered, "and I'll tell you what, mother, if I could get Ruth Levison to paddle with me, I should be the happiest man in England."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Kent, almost under her breath, "that is what I have always dreaded."

"Why, what have you against her?" he said sharply.

"Everything! In the first place, I could never receive her. As you know, I have an antipathy to Jews."

"I haven't," he answered stolidly. "A good Jew is better than a bad Christian any day. There is no reason why——"

"There is every reason why you should *not* marry a woman like Ruth Levison," interrupted Mrs. Kent.

"I don't know of one," he said curtly.

"Regy, my dear son!" she exclaimed, rising from her chair and laying her hand upon his shoulder; "I am more ambitious for you than you are for yourself. You have fought your way so far; you are a rich and a popular man; why shouldn't you stand for the next election and get into Parliament?"

"And like the ambitious frog, swell till I bust!" he laughed. "No, no, mother! I'd never cast an eye in that direction. There are enough asses to bray in the House without adding my hee-haw!"

"At any rate," rejoined Mrs. Kent impatiently, "when you marry you should choose a woman of good family, who could help you to rise in the world."

"I don't want to take a header over my wife's shoulders."

"You would have no difficulty," she continued, without heeding his interruption; "there are scores of women of noble and aristocratic families whom you could have for the asking."

"I don't want to buy an article of that sort. No doubt it would be easy enough to find a fine lady who would condescend to spend my money and look down upon the man who made it. Not for Joe!" he added, shaking his head. After a moment's pause, he asked more seriously:

"Why are you so set against Ruth? You know nothing about her."

"I know she is the daughter—but there!" she added abruptly, "never mind whose daughter she is."

"I don't," he answered; "if she was the daughter of a chimney

sweep she would still be 'Ruth' to me—the best and most beautiful woman in the world."

"A man of your age ought to talk more sense—such twaddle! 'The best and most beautiful women' have managed to ruin men very cleverly before now. I want you to look at things in a practical, common-sense light. Now Ruth Levison has no family, no fortune, she may be handsome in her way, but she's a long way past her youth."

"She's not a day over six-and-twenty!" protested Miss Levison's admirer warmly.

"Bah!" said his mother, continuing as though his protest merited no more notice. "And though they live on such friendly terms, she is only a sort of governess-companion at the Blaines'. I believe she even receives a salary!"

"A good job she has brains enough to earn it," he observed. "It is no use talking, mother, we are playing a game of ninepins; as fast as you set up an argument against Ruth, I knock it down with another. If I can get Ruth, I mean to have her!" he added, decidedly.

"No fear of that!" said Mrs. Kent, in acrimonious accents; "you have only got to ask and have! When did a Jew refuse to barter anything for money? Why, they'd sell their souls for a bag of gold and throw their poor bodies into the bargain!"

"So far as that goes," rejoined her son, "I don't know that there is much difference between Jews and Christians. We are all as God made us. But as regards Ruth, you are 'frighting yourself with false fire,' mother; however much I may care for *her*, I don't know that she cares a jot for me!"

"That won't matter; she'll care fast enough for your money, if not for you."

"We shall see."

"My dear boy, you know I am only anxious for your good," she rejoined with a desponding sigh; "and you know that my life is very precarious. My heart is terribly affected, and my liver altogether wrong—indeed, suffering as I do from such a complication of diseases, I may go under any day."

"Oh, come! I say, mother! you've suffered from a complication of diseases ever since I was born, any one of 'em enough to kill any ordinary Christian right off."

"Ah! you laugh now, as you always do, when I speak of my ailments," she answered reproachfully, "but a day will come!"

"A good many days, I hope," he interrupted; "but bless you, if it gives you pleasure to have a complication of horrors, enjoy 'em! I don't mind, so long as you remain the same kind, good old mother you've always been to me!" and he put his arm round her and gave her a sounding kiss as he spoke.

"The worry of housekeeping is getting too much for me, Regy," she said, somewhat mollified; "it is time that I took a back seat, and you brought a younger mistress home."

"That is exactly what I'm wanting to do," he answered; "only the mistress must be one of my own choosing, mind that! I know there's plenty of nice girls cruising around, as pretty as wax dolls and just about as companionable, that is not the sort of thing I want. If I have an opportunity, I shall speak to Ruth this very day!"

"You've said nothing as yet!" exclaimed his mother eagerly. "Not compromised yourself in any way?"

"If you call it compromising to let a woman know you're fond of her—in fact, dote upon the ground she walks on—I fancy that I've compromised myself pretty well, but *she* don't seem to see it."

"I wish these Blaines had never come to Walmerstown!" exclaimed Mrs. Kent. "I feel that they've brought a world of trouble in their train; but it's fate—I suppose it's fate," she added, almost under her breath. "Regy," she added, after a moment's pause, "I suspect there's something queer about these Blaines. Who is that old lady who keeps in such seclusion, and is never seen except at church?"

"That's a very good place to be seen at, isn't it?"

"You don't understand. I don't think you ought to be getting on such intimate terms with people you know so little about. I'm sure they've got a skeleton in the house somewhere."

"Suppose they have—provided they keep it under lock and key, I don't see that it is any concern of ours. It is not fair to surmise things about people. Suppose any one should start a report that *you* had a skeleton hidden away among your own dead years!"

"Who dares say that?" exclaimed Mrs. Kent, with startling energy, clutching the arms of her chair and half rising from her seat. "Who dares to slander me in the sight of my own son?"

Her face turned absolutely livid, and she trembled from head to foot. Amazed at this sudden outburst, for which he could see no reason, her son stared at her in silent bewilderment! She went on, in incoherent anger, "Who dares accuse me? Let them come face to face, not go behind my back and slander me to my own son. You ought to be ashamed to hear your mother's character blackened, and her good name trodden under foot!"

"Had she gone suddenly mad?" he wondered. As soon as he recovered from his bewilderment, he exclaimed:

"My dear mother, what on earth are you going on in this wild way for? No one has ever said or hinted anything about you! Is it likely they would to *me*? Besides, what is there to say? Of all people in the world, you are the least likely to suffer from spiteful slanders."

"There is no one above the reach of evil tongues," she answered, her wrath quieting down almost as quickly as it had been raised.

"What made you say what you did about skeletons?"

"Why, I only meant to show that what you say of other people they might, with just as much reason, say of you. You are too thin-skinned, mother, I've noticed that in you before—'frighted with false fire,' as the fellow says in the play. On the slightest possible ground you fancy people suspect you of something though the Lord knows why you should!"

"I suppose it is being so much alone makes me feel things so," she answered calmly.

"You feel things when there's nothing to be felt," he grumbled; "and as for being so much alone, it is all your own fault. You could mix with your neighbours pleasantly enough if you liked, but you are so unsociable."

"The people here are too fine folk for me; they wouldn't care for my company, nor I shouldn't care for theirs. We've been brought up in different worlds. You can't teach a chick to swim in its old age. My only thought is for you, Regy, now. You are sociable enough for two! and so that you are happy, I am content."

After a few more words from the genial-hearted Reginald, mother and son parted. She watched him across the lawn with closed lips and puckered brows—and still stood watching long after he had disappeared, and repeated his words over again.

"'Frighted with false fire,' he said, and it is true! but though

it has smouldered for so many years, it may burst out any day ; and then—and then—he would kill me if he knew ! He is so proud ! ”

CHAPTER II.

THE BREAKING-UP OF THE TENNIS PARTY.

MRS. BLAINE had taken possession of “The Friars,” and intended to remain there all the summer.

It was a grand old house, gaunt and grey now, for time was beginning to tell upon it, cutting deep furrows on its once noble front, crumbling its ornamental stone-work and tweaking the noses of its commemorative saints till they came off, artfully hiding the mutilations beneath the innocent-looking ivy, which crept into the interstices and covered every crack and cranny with its shining green leaves, so clothing the whole with living beauty. Something of its old monastic days seemed to cling about “The Friars” still. The ghosts of the dead years could not rest in their graves, but lingered brooding over their old home—a voiceless, viewless presence shadowing it everywhere.

It was quite the show-place of the neighbourhood, much to the disgust of Mr. Kent, who had a contempt for “these rubbishy old houses,” and thought that his big brand-new mansion ought to be the attraction ; “what people could see in these mouldy old places he could not understand.” Still, they came from far and near to have a glimpse of the romantic old Friars, and organized picnic parties in the woods near by.

The position of The Friars was isolated, low-lying upon shelving ground sloping towards the sea. During the winter months it was left very much to itself ; but for the last two years Mrs. Blaine had occupied it for the summer time. She got it for a mere song, as few people cared to live there, it was so lonely ; besides, it had the reputation of being haunted ; but she was above what she called “idle superstitions,” and believing that the best mode of purifying the ghostly atmosphere was the importation of healthy young life into its midst, came thither early in May, and brought two bright young girls, her niece and daughter, in her train, whose flying feet and cheerful voices chased the echoes into their gloomy corners, and filled the place with exuberant young life. Although they seldom had visitors staying in

the house, and, as Mrs. Kent had hinted, very little was known about them in the neighbourhood, yet there was no lack of society and amusement for the girls during their summer season at The Friars. Although it had few of what is called modern conveniences, Mrs. Blaine contrived to make it comfortable and homelike. She shut off that portion of the house she did not care to use, and transformed the rest into cosy nooks and corners bright with flowers and sunshine; and was always hospitably ready to make her neighbours welcome—a privilege of which especially the masculine members of Walmerstown society were not slow to avail themselves, as “Mrs. Blaine’s girls,” Dolly and Claire, were both pretty and popular.

It was a glorious June day, and the Blaines were giving one of their series of tennis parties; for, in spite of its isolation, The Friars was a tempting rallying point; the young folk thought nothing of tramping or driving four or five miles for a rollicking good game at tennis. In the distance, the great billows could be seen rolling in, shimmering green in the sunlight, kissing the land with white foam lips and whispering secrets which the land told not again.

The grounds of The Friars stretched almost to the water’s edge; a low stone wall kept off the encroachments of the sea; the gradual slope was covered with brushwood and straggling bushes, a wild weedy expanse, creeping upward till it reached the garden, still wild, yet more cultivated, with tall hollyhocks and sunflowers standing stiff and strong in their scentless beauty; while nearer the house great beds of geraniums and fuchsias, with borders of old-fashioned southern-wood and bushes, covered with roses red and white, held their place among a wealth of humble sweet-smelling flowers; a very wilderness it was of bright colours and sweet odours—a far more pleasant place to wander in than the trimly-kept garden, where no sweet wild flower dare show its simple face. A broad expanse of smooth-shaven lawn was marked out for the season into tennis courts, where a party of young people were now hard at work with bat and ball, playing with all their might.

If you want to see a young man at his best, watch him at his favourite game; the dress is more becoming than the stereotyped suit of funereal black, crowned with the hideous chimney-pot of civilization; the light loose suit, well-fitting enough to allow the limbs free play, with no starching nor stiffening anywhere, shows

off his figure at its best, and, as he catches the flying ball, with all his senses on the alert, keen of eye, swift of foot, he makes a healthful picture of strong young manhood.

The girls, too, in their characteristic costumes, add a charming feature to the animated scene—their cheeks aglow, their laughing eyes beaming beneath the coquettish hats, but with no thought of coquetry in their minds, as they flash hither and thither, watching with eager eyes the flight of their ball as though it was the ball of destiny they were trying to send to some special goal.

The young folks went at it with such zest and earnestness on this sunny day, they might have been playing the game of life—as, indeed, perhaps they were, playing it on a small scale, weaving the tiny threads together, the progress of their work invisible to mortal eyes—at present. The shouts of the young men, directing or chaffing their companions, the merry laughter of the girls as they hit or missed, or sent their ball flying into the enemy's camp, filled the air with human music. The game was over, and they lounged in groups of twos and threes, talking over the whys and wherefores of success or failure, and changing or deciding "sides" for the next game.

Mrs. Blaine sat, enjoying a brief rest from her hospitable duties, on the terrace above. She had a thoughtful look upon her face, her eyes followed her daughter Dorothy's movements with a grave expression, though there was a smile upon her lips.

Dorothy, or Dolly, as she was more generally called, had taken off her hat, and was swinging it on her arm as she came briskly to her mother's side.

"Please, mother, dear, we want some more lemonade; it is such thirsty work, and we have drained everything dry." She gave a little gasping sigh, adding, as she fanned herself with her hat, "How warm it is!"

"You run about too much, Dolly," replied Mrs. Blaine, smoothing the girl's hair caressingly; "I think we must stop this tennis-playing."

"I like it, mother! You often say that we girls don't take exercise enough. Yet you grumble when we do."

"Because you go to extremes," replied Mrs. Blaine. "Yesterday you complained of being tired—dead-beat, only going down to the village and back, yet you race about at tennis half the day."

"And then am quite ready to begin again!" laughed Dolly.

"But there's all the difference between this sort of thing and an uninteresting walk along a dusty road. I don't call *that* exercise. Besides, one never gets tired of doing what one likes, and I love this glorious game! it exercises one's wits, as well as one's arms and legs." At this moment cries for "Miss Blaine!" mingled with the more familiar name of "Dolly!" came from the other side of the netting, and a tall lithe young fellow, bat in hand, came to fetch her.

"You are wanted, Miss Blaine. We've booked you for our side this time," he announced.

"You've no business to do that, sir, without asking my leave," she answered saucily.

"What would be the use of asking when we knew you would say 'Yes?'" he answered, staring as though he thought she had rebuked him seriously.

"Ah! you know too much," she answered, gravely.

"Well, you couldn't be so impolite as to say 'No,'" he said, with a surprised look in his handsome eyes. "Besides, we want you. You are one of our best players, you know."

"And so am driven to the weakest side. Well, all right!"

"Come on then," he said, prosaically, as they strolled away side by side.

"Don't forget the lemonade and tea, mother!" Dolly called back over her shoulder; and in another moment they had joined their party. As Mrs. Blaine glanced after them, her brow contracted with the ghost of a frown, and the shadow deepened on her face.

Dorothy's companion, George D'Alton, was a lieutenant in the army—a fine, athletic young fellow, just the stuff a soldier should be made of—good-looking, though by no means a "beauty-man." He was fair-complexioned, with large blue eyes, and thick, close-cut, curly hair, which his family called auburn—others called it red. He was not particularly intellectual, but was a thoroughly good fellow and a gentleman, not only on the surface, but to the heart. He could ride, row, or shoot with any man, and take a hand at any game that was going on. His genial manners made him a favourite everywhere, especially with the young people at The Friars. It used to be "George" and "Dolly" between them when they were boy and girl, but latterly it had stiffened into "Mr. D'Alton" and "Miss Blaine."

They had played several games, and the energies of some of them were beginning to flag when Mr. Kent appeared upon the scene and gave a fillip to their flagging spirits. He was an inveterate tennis-player, though he was always red, and always hot, and though the constant application of his handkerchief to his broad, plump face appeared necessary, yet he never faltered—he went boisterously into the game, wielding the bat with vigorous wildness, and generally missing his ball; nevertheless, he was always welcomed on either side of the players, which said a great deal for his popularity.

Presently he began to play at random, his ball fell wide of the mark. The level rays of the setting sun were in his eyes, he said, and dazzled them so that he could not play. With reckless carelessness, he tossed the ball in one direction, and flung the bat in another, as another object, more dazzling to his eyes than the setting sun, stepped out upon the terrace, and stood ringing a bell to summon the players to some more substantial refreshment than tea and lemonade.

It was Ruth Levison, who for many years had occupied the position of governess to Mrs. Blaine's daughter Dorothy and her niece, Claire Thurlowe. When the girls left the school-room she still remained and was now the confidential friend of the family, the invaluable housekeeper and secretary, and regarded by the mistress in the light of an elder daughter.

She was rather an uncommon type of her race; being tall, slight and fair, with grey eyes and hair of russet brown, shot with rich red gold; she always wore it in one fashion—in massive coils wound round her head, and waving low upon her forehead. Her nose was slightly aquiline, her head well poised upon her full white throat. She was a very beautiful woman. As to her age, she might have been twenty-five, she might have been nearing thirty-five—with women of her type, the years don't count. She presented a picturesque figure as she stood there in a long amber-lined tea-gown, its flowing draperies girdled in at her slender waist.

In obedience to her summons the players left off playing, and came slowly sauntering towards her, evidently in no hurry. Mr. Kent was the first to reach her. She held out her hand to him with a pleasant smile, and the usual words of courteous greeting. He took the hand, and clasped it perhaps longer than

strict etiquette warranted, looking at her the while as men are apt to look on the object of their adoration. She glanced down at the clasped hands, then up in his face :

"Shall we go in ? Mrs. Blaine has been expecting you this long time. We began to think you were not coming at all."

He did not take the hint and loose her hand, but stood for a moment enjoying the felicity of silence. Then he found courage to say :

"Won't you come for a turn, Miss Levison—Ruth ?" He had never called her "Ruth" before. She answered with a rather surprised inquiry :

"Go for a turn ? *Now !* Why ?"

"Because I want to talk to you. I've got something serious to say." He had fired his first shot, and then, surprised at his own temerity, stood blushing like an apoplectic lobster.

"Something serious?" she repeated, with a puzzled air. "Regarding me or you ?"

"Me, mostly."

"There's nothing wrong at Kent House, I hope—nothing wrong with your mother?" she said politely, but with no special anxiety.

"Oh, no! It is all right enough there—at least, as right as it can be till I—till you——" He was getting along too quickly, and began to flounder.

"Oh! well, come in!" exclaimed Ruth, feeling for his confusion. "We can talk as much, and as seriously as you like, over our cup of tea."

He followed her into the room, where a substantial high tea was being carried on with energy and general satisfaction ; the busy hum of conversation, if the young folks' lively chatter could be called conversation, was interspersed with "the rippling murmur of low laughter's grace;" everybody had a welcoming word or smile for Mr. Kent, for even those who laughed at his *gaucheries* liked him all the same. He was so genial and unpretentious, though he was so rich ; he gave himself no airs on that account. He "owned up"—as he said—to the fact that he was a self-made man, and made no pretence to education or gentility. He was a shrewd man of business—and that was all. He received the attentions of his more exalted neighbours with becoming humility, which was precisely what they liked, and raised

him higher in their estimation. "If people will only acknowledge their inferiority, it makes things easier, and saves one a world of trouble in putting them down"—as Mrs. Chalcot, the rector's wife, tersely explained.

"So you could not persuade Mrs. Kent to drive over for an hour's chat?" said Mrs. Blaine, with a cordial hand-shake.

"You must please to excuse her," he answered; "my mother is like the hermit crab—it is hard to get her out of her shell."

He made his way to the other end of the room to where Ruth had established herself at the tea-table, and devoted himself thenceforth to assisting her, fetching and carrying according to her orders, feeling quite confidential as he whispered in her ear, "more sugar" for this person, "no milk" for that; he carried plates of ham or chicken hither and thither—now ringing for more muffins, then ordering fresh salads, indeed acquitting himself so well that Ruth declared he deserved "a vote of thanks, that she never could have struggled through her hospitable work without him," whereat he became radiant with delight, and thought he was making way excellently well.

The young people lingered round the table long after their appetites were satisfied, loth to break up the pleasant party. They conspired together and proposed that they should wind up with a carpet dance; the proposal was put to the vote and triumphantly carried, and they began to settle preliminaries and clear decks for action forthwith.

"Ruth dear, you'll play!" exclaimed Dolly; "and you, Mr. Kent, will dance the first dance with me!"

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure, Miss Dolly, but I can't dance."

"Oh, yes, you can, if you try," she answered airily; "you've only got to feel the music and your feet will go of themselves—dancing is just as easy as walking if you only know how."

"Ah! the knowing 'how' is just the question," he replied. "The fact is, Miss Dolly, I never like to attempt to do a thing when there's a chance of failure."

"You won't fail here; I'll keep you all right—we'll call it the first lesson—tum-te-tum-tum"—she began, twirling round. "Come now, I'll take no refusal!"

"Ah, well, if you insist," he answered, "I daresay I can manage to pull you round, but we won't call it dancing."

Dorothy and Claire, prime movers in the impromptu affair,

began pushing back the tables and chairs, but before Dolly could carry out her daring project of teaching "her tame bear" to dance, she caught sight of the telegraph boy coming towards the house, and rushed across the lawn to meet him, and came back waving the telegram above her head.

"It is for grandmamma—I'll take it to her!" she exclaimed, as she ran swiftly upstairs, tossed the missive into her grandmother's lap, saying, "For you, Granny!" and before the old lady could wipe her spectacles and saddle her nose, Dolly had dashed down the stairs and re-entered the room just as Mrs. Blaine came out of the conservatory with a basket of ferns and flowers, having been too much occupied to observe the arrival of the telegram.

Ruth had just sat down to the piano; she began playing a lively waltz, and the room was immediately filled with whirling figures waltzing to their hearts' content. Suddenly the music ceased, and at the same moment, as if by magic, the dancers stopped too, and all eyes were turned towards the door.

Old Mrs. Thurlowe seldom came downstairs; some of the visitors did not even know her by sight, and they stared surprised at the tall black-robed figure of the old lady, her grey hair disordered, her cap awry, her sallow wrinkled face pale and agitated, with the open telegram in her hands.

"What is it, mother?" exclaimed Mrs. Blaine, hurrying forward.

"Read!" replied Mrs. Thurlowe, placing the open telegram in her hand. Mrs. Blaine read it with evident emotion.

"Bad news, mamma?" inquired Dorothy, open-eyed.

"Something unpleasant, I'm sure!" said Claire sympathetically.

Mrs. Blaine handed the telegram to the girls; it was not so terrible in their eyes as in those of their elders. It ran thus—"Sir Reginald Thurlowe died this morning suddenly from heart disease."

"Why, poor old Uncle Reg!" exclaimed Dolly, evidently not much agitated, while Claire said, with mild regret, "Dear, dear me, how sad!"

The telegram was sent by Mr. Levison, Ruth's father, who had been for many years steward to Sir Reginald Thurlowe, and was the general factotum and confidential agent of his master.

The young guests had the tact to see that they were *de trop*, that some trouble had come upon the household. Ruth rose

from the piano ; evidently there was to be no more dancing that day. After brief leave-taking the party broke up, everybody wondering, yet not specially interested in what had befallen at The Friars ; they knew there was neither husband, father, or son in the case, so they did not think anything could matter very much, and they went on their way looking forward to a renewal of pleasant days at The Friars at no distant date.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY SKELETON.

THEY did not indulge in much conversation at The Friars on that evening ; in fact, the mysterious conduct of the elders of the household, who retired to Mrs. Thurlowe's apartment and held a long conversation together with closed doors, perplexed the younger ones exceedingly.

The two girls, Dorothy and Claire, had an ill-used sort of feeling that they were being shut out of something, and resented it accordingly. They occupied adjoining rooms, and generally performed their evening toilettes together in one or other of them. They sat now in Dorothy's room, in a rather discontented state of mind—Claire combing her long soft golden hair, while Dolly brushed out her dark rebellious curls, which never would consent to lie smooth. "I can't think why we are all to be upset about Uncle Reginald's death? Nobody cared much about him when he was alive," remarked Dorothy.

"I didn't ; he always disliked *me*," said Claire, "and I can't think why?"

"That's all your fancy," replied Dorothy, "though for the matter of that I don't think he had much love for any of us."

"He never invited *me* down to Knaresborough," said Claire, "though he has asked you to stay there for days together. When we were children and he brought us birthday gifts, he gave me mine with a difference. He always showed some signs of family affection for *you*, Dolly. Children don't notice things much at the time, but they think of them afterwards ; and, it is strange, but I don't remember his ever having kissed me!"

"That was no loss," rejoined Dolly ; "I remember how I used to dread the performance—he had such a horrid bristly beard."

"I don't see why Ruth should be taken into confidence while we are left out in the cold," said Claire, brushing her hair so vigorously as to get it into a tangle. "I met her just now as I came upstairs; she was coming out of Granny's room, where she and auntie are still talking; I saw Ruth had been crying. What could she have to cry about, I wonder? and she put her arms round my neck, and sobbed over me and called me 'her poor darling Claire,' as if some trouble had fallen upon *me*."

"Well," rejoined Dorothy, "though Ruth seems cold and undemonstrative as a rule, she does gush sometimes! those quiet people always do, when they are once moved; and do you know—it seems odd," she added, in a low confidential voice, "but Ruth is always so interested in all that goes on at Knaresborough; sometimes I fancy that years ago, when she was quite young, you know, she may have been fond of Uncle Reginald."

"Rubbish!" replied Claire decidedly; "he must always have been a hundred years older than Ruth. If you remember that Ruth spent all her early years on the estate, you'll see it's quite natural that she is interested in all that goes on there—and you don't know how far Uncle Reginald's death may affect her father."

"I don't believe Ruth cares much about *him*! and I do hate family mysteries!" yawned Dorothy, "especially when one is shut out of them, and our nice party broken up just at its pleasantest hour! It is not kind of mamma to treat us like this, giving us a sugarplum and sending us to bed, as if we were children! but I'll find out what it all means, as sure as my name is Dolly Blaine."

"If it is anything disagreeable, aunt is sure to keep it from us—she hates to see us worried," said Claire.

"That's nonsense—we can't go through the world without worries—we ought to be taught how to bear them. When I have children, I shall bring them face to face with everything disagreeable from the hour they're born."

"What a change a little thing makes in a house!" sighed Claire; "we don't seem to breathe the same air as we did this morning—now it seems full of gloom and shadows, as though something were going to happen worse than Uncle Reg's death!"

"Don't give us the creeps just as we're going to bed," said Dolly, gathering her things together. "I'm off—Good night!"

The next morning there was a family debate as to the necessity of going to Knaresborough. There was no male member of the family, at least not in England; and Mrs. Blaine suggested that her mother, as being the widow of the only brother of the deceased, should start at once for Knaresborough, but Mrs. Thurlowe declared that her age and infirmities must be her excuse if excuse were needed. To Knaresborough she would not go, but proposed that her daughter, Mrs. Blaine, the dead man's niece, should represent the family.

They were strangely unlike, this mother and daughter—Mrs. Thurlowe was tall, dark and thin, her aquiline features stern in outline, her face long and narrow, her lips pale and pinched, a certain puritanic stiffness about her whole aspect. Mrs. Blaine was fair and comely—a good-looking woman still—with rather cold light-blue eyes, a smooth, plump, fresh-coloured face somewhat flat and characterless in its outlines, and a sometimes set and mechanical smile on her lips, which, though almost as thin as her mother's, were cherry-red as a girl's; they lacked the harshness of the rigid lines of the mother's unyielding mouth, but also lacked their firmness.

While they were still debating the question of going to Knaresborough, Mr. Watson, the family lawyer, was announced. He had come down by an early train and arrived at luncheon time, when all the family were seated at table. He gave them a detailed account of the unexpected end of their deceased relative. Most unexpected indeed it was; he had been out with the hounds that very day, and besides was entertaining a pleasant house party; late in the evening he had retired to rest, in his accustomed health and good spirits; in the morning, when the servant went to call him as usual, he found him seated in his chair, cold and dead, dressed exactly as he had left his friends the preceding night.

"An inquest is to be held to-morrow," said Mr. Watson. "Though there is no doubt whatever that he died from heart complaint, from which he had been suffering for some years, still an inquiry must be made. I thought I would run down instead of writing, have a little talk, and escort you ladies to Knaresborough. Though Sir Reginald has left his affairs in perfect order, yet there are many matters that require the presence of the next of kin. We can start by the 4.20 express," he added.

"Meanwhile I should like to have a little business talk. We need not trouble the young ladies with our dry-as-dust legal matters," he added, smiling at the two girls, who were looking rather bored already.

"We shall be very glad to listen, if our opinion or advice can be of any use," said Dolly loftily; "or, mother dear—as there is no time to lose if you are going by the express—we had better go and pack your box; yours too, Granny, if you will let us?"

Mrs. Blaine gave brief directions, but Mrs. Thurlowe said shortly:

"You need not trouble about me. I'm not going."

"Then, mother dear, you can't possibly go alone," said Dolly; "hadn't I better go with you?"

"Thanks, dear child—but I would not submit you to the melancholy ordeal. Ruth shall go, and I daresay she will be glad of the opportunity to see her father."

"Always Ruth!" muttered Dolly pettishly as they went out. As the door closed behind them Mr. Watson looked rather surprised, and said:

"Did I understand rightly, Mrs. Thurlowe, that you have decided *not* to go to Knaresborough?"

The old lady inclined her head, but said nothing.

"But, my dear mother, think!" said Mrs. Blaine deprecatingly. "You to be absent from the funeral, you who represent my father, his only brother! What will the world say?"

"The world and I parted company when my son died," she answered.

"Harold dead?" repeated Mr. Watson. "I never heard of that."

"He died to me when he brought disgrace upon our good name," replied Mrs. Thurlowe sternly.

"But, my dear lady," said Mr. Watson "that bygone matter has nothing to do with the case in point."

"It has everything to do with it," she answered; "I am not a forgiving woman, Mr. Watson, and my husband's brother was cruel and inhuman to my son, who had a right to expect mercy from his own kindred, criminal though he was."

"Mother, I hate to hear you apply that word to Harold; the crime was never really satisfactorily proved against him."

"The law pronounced him guilty, and what the law does must be right; a jury of twelve men cannot be wrong."

"They have been proved wrong scores of times," said Mrs. Blaine. "After a man has suffered misery and disgrace for years, he has been recalled and graciously *pardoned* for a crime he has never committed—pardoned for being the victim of a legal blunder! Mother, you condemn my uncle for being hard upon poor Harold—it seems to me that *you*, his own mother, are harder still."

"No; I am hard upon his sin, not upon *him*," she answered. "I can separate the crime from the criminal. I could forgive Harold. I cannot forget his sin, which has brought disgrace on us. It was Sir Reginald Thurlowe who dragged that disgrace into the public light, and it is for my son's disgrace that my heart is hardened against him now."

"But, my dear madam——" began Mr. Watson.

"But, sir!" exclaimed the old lady, with more vehemence than was usual with her, "he might have hidden the sin and pardoned the sinner—but he did not—he set the cruel law to work against my boy—he dishonoured my husband's name—that was *ours* and *his*! I vowed then I would never look upon his face again, alive or dead and—I will not!"

They knew she would keep her word, so urged their point no more; it was no use wasting time or words upon the subject, there was matter of much more importance to be considered.

The death of Sir Reginald Thurlowe would make a material difference in the fortunes of Claire, the only child of Harold, now Sir Harold Thurlowe; from being a dependent upon her family (although she had never been allowed to feel her dependence) she would be an heiress of considerable importance. Mr. Watson was anxious to learn how much she knew of her unfortunate father's position. Claire was only six years old when her father, then a young man on the right side of thirty, was convicted and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for forging the name of his Uucle Reginald to a cheque for £800. At the trial he pleaded "Not Guilty." While admitting the fact, which he could not deny, as the bank clerks were *en évidence*, that he had cashed the cheque, he denied the signature, and stated that he had presented the cheque at Mr. Levison's request, and to him had handed over the monies received. At the same time, he acknowledged that he had borrowed three hundred pounds of Mr. Levison in order to extricate himself from some then pressing difficulties.

He had greatly surprised and displeased his friends, some few years before, by marrying a very beautiful but portionless girl, and as nobody knew anything of her belongings, the family refused to receive her and his uncle never forgave him. She died after a few not very happy years, and left him with a little girl, Claire, and a host of debts contracted in his name and without his knowledge. At the time of the forgery, he was known to be very short of money; yet at that very time, these debts had been cleared off—he said from the loan he received from Mr. Levison. However, when that gentleman was perforce called as a witness, he tried hard to shield the honour of the family he had served so long and faithfully—but reluctantly, and with an evidently grieved spirit, he was compelled to deny upon oath that he had anything to do with the aforesaid transaction. He had never given the cheque to Mr. Harold Thurlowe, had never received the money from or lent any money to him. He was deeply distressed at having to appear there and bear this testimony, but in self-defence he was forced to do so, as, by the statement of the accused, he tried to fix the crime on him; but though he was a Jew, with true Christian spirit he forgave him, and would if he could have gladly averted the consequences from Harold's head; but when the law has once fixed its talons in the victim it holds him fast, and though sometimes a storm of public opinion may tear him from its grasp, no such storm was evoked in Harold Thurlowe's case.

In answer to an inquiry of Mr. Watson's concerning Claire, Mrs. Blaine answered:

"Claire was so young when these dreadful things happened, she could not have understood them; and since—well, there has been no time when we thought it advisable to touch upon such a subject."

"Where would have been the use?" exclaimed Mrs. Thurlowe. "She was an excitable, high-spirited child—why should her life be clouded by the knowledge of this miserable secret?"

"It may be sprung upon her one day with a terrible shock," said Mr. Watson, thoughtfully. "I always think it is a pity to keep people in ignorance of what they must one day know."

"There is no necessity that she should ever know," said Mrs. Blaine. "Claire is so sensitive and feels so deeply, I am sure if she knew of her father's suffering and disgrace, the sorrow and

the shame of it would crush her ; I don't believe she would ever hold up her head again. How could she be gay and happy as—thank God—she is, knowing all that we know ? ”

“ If God chooses to send afflictions, in whatever shape they come—we cannot see as He sees, but we know that out of evil there often comes good—I think we ought to grasp our nettle.”

“ Aye, but we have a right to avoid it if we can.”

“ But, as a rule, we cannot,” he answered ; “ we may avoid it to-day, but to-morrow it has an aggravated sting. Of course, you know your own affairs best, it is not for me to intrude my advice—but, may I ask, what does Miss Claire think ? Does she suppose that her father is dead ? ”

“ No—she believes he is travelling, sometimes in Mexico or in California, sometimes in Nicaragua—prospecting in mining districts, seeing in all directions how he can best make a fortune to bring home to her. Sometimes she chafes at his being away so long, and writes begging him to come home and never mind the fortune. She remembers him quite well, you know, and adores his memory.”

“ I think he must return now,” said Mr. Watson, “ however reluctant he may be to do so.”

“ I have written to him often,” said Mrs. Blaine, “ but he says he will never come back till this stigma falls from him.”

“ Humph ! ” exclaimed Mr. Watson, as though he doubted if that would ever be. “ I shall write to him at once in my legal capacity, and urge upon him the necessity of his immediate presence here ; and Miss Claire—— ”

“ Will believe that present circumstances have compelled his return—that there is no longer the need for him to exile himself in search of a fortune elsewhere.”

“ I trust no whisper of the real state of affairs will ever reach her ; but the world is heedless and unforgetting,” said Mr. Watson, reflectively.

“ Who would dare ! who could be so cruel as to crush a child with the weight of its father's sin ? I have faith in the kindness of human nature, and do not believe there is a chance of that,” said Mrs. Blaine.

“ Still, you must remember that at Knaresborough *now* all the old story will be opened by Sir Reginald's death,” he suggested.

"We shall not dream of taking Claire to Knaresborough," said Mrs. Blaine, decidedly.

There was a tap at the door.

"May I come in?" and Claire's face followed her voice. "I hope I don't interrupt you, but, auntie dear, if you are really going by the 4.20 train you have no time to lose. Dolly has put up everything she thinks you'd want, the trap's at the door, and here comes Jim for the luggage."

Dolly came dancing down the stairs, followed more sedately by Miss Levison, dressed for the journey, and bringing Mrs. Blaine's mantle and bonnet in her hand. Kisses and hugs were freely dispensed, mingled with entreaties that they would soon come back, and meanwhile "write every day and send all news of everybody."

Mrs. Thurlowe's last words were:

"Remember me very kindly to your father, Ruth; there is no man in the world I respect more than Mr. Levison."

The girls shaded their eyes from the glaring sun, and watched the vehicle till it was beyond their sight. They returned to the house feeling that home would be rather lonely now that Ruth and mother were both away.

"I don't remember that we two have ever been left alone before!" exclaimed Dolly.

"We are not exactly alone now," rejoined Claire; "there's Granny."

"Oh, Granny doesn't count; she talks very little to us, and when she does, it is chiefly to find fault—it's lucky she keeps so much in her own room. I wonder if all old people are disagreeable and unsociable!"

"I'm always sorry for old people," said Claire, "sorry for their *being* old. We young ones have always something to look forward to, something to hope for. If the present is dark we look for brighter days to come. *They* can't—their days are naturally very limited, each one is leading on to a darker night—and as for Granny, you know, Dolly, I always think she has got, or has had some great trouble somewhere."

"Well, everybody has troubles, but most people get over them—it is foolish not to," said the decided Dolly; "they say troubles are sent for our good, and if they are, we ought to be glad to get them, and make as much haste as we can to get over them."

"There are some troubles people never get over," said Claire gravely, "some things so terrible they can't rally from, and we should hardly respect them if they did."

"That's nonsense!" said Dolly; "everybody must rally from everything—they may be knocked down and get badly hurt, but they get up again. Whatever happens, people have got to live, unless they kill themselves, and some are too cowardly, and some are too brave for that."

"Yes, it is much braver to face a sorrow and live it down than to fly in the face of fate and end it in our own blind fashion. You know, Dolly," Claire continued thoughtfully, "the end of one thing may only be the beginning of another, we never really know when or where anything ends."

"Dear old Claire, you always go in for things so solemnly!" said Dolly; "if only female preachers were allowed in this country, I'm sure you'd do well in the pulpit! Do you remember, at the Glaishers' party last year, somebody said in the sweetest American twang, 'Our dear pastor is over here for a few weeks—one of the most eloquent preachers we have—may I introduce you?' and lo! instead of a venerable clergyman, or a budding young curate, behold an elderly female in corkscrew curls and spectacles!" and the two girls wandered off into reminiscences of the Glaishers' party.

"By-the-bye," Claire said suddenly, "Dolly dear, did auntie say anything of what we are to do about our mourning? You know, of course, we must have black of some sort."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," answered Dolly, "but everything seems in such a hurry. It seems to me that mamma had hardly time to think. There was that Mr. Watson coming down in that unexpected way, and carrying her and Ruth off so unceremoniously. Very inconsiderate of them to go without leaving us some directions."

"Well, but as they have gone we must give directions to ourselves. What do you think we had better do?" said Claire.

"I don't think we need go into the deepest affliction department," said Dolly, "he was only mother's uncle. I don't think we need send to town; as usual, we must arrange things on the strictest economical principles. I've only got eight-and-sixpence left out of my allowance."

"Had we not better consult grandmamma?" suggested Claire.

Grandmamma was duly consulted, and to their surprise she in return consulted them as to their wants and requirements.

"Well, Granny," replied Dolly, who was generally spokeswoman, "what we want and what we can have are very different things, but I really think I ought to have a new black silk dress."

"I can turn my old one," exclaimed Claire, who thought more of what she could do without than what she could have, "and take the coloured trimmings off my black cashmere, and furbish up my silk cape. It will not be the first time I have made an old thing look like new. A very small outlay will put me in decent mourning."

"There need be no talk of furbishing up anything," said grandmamma; "your mother wishes you both to have everything handsome and good. If you will let me have a list of all you wish to have—you especially, my dear Claire—I will send them off to Madame Colombe to-night."

Dolly was delighted, and went off to make her list with a most important air. It was the first time she had had *carte blanche* in the matter of dress, and she revelled in it accordingly.

"It seems so strange; I wonder whether the skies are going to fall, Claire! Have just what we want! Evidently there's going to be no cheeseparing in this case; no fight for a feather, or struggle for a yard of lace. I shall order my mantle to be trimmed with the very handsomest *passementerie*; one doesn't need crape for a great-uncle, you know. Do you think we ought to have black-bordered pocket-handkerchiefs, just to put our noses in mourning? Why shouldn't our noses mourn as well as the rest of us? What a delightful occupation this is, and I thought we should have such a dreadfully dull day!"

"Oh! do be quiet, Dolly; you confuse me so, I can't get on with my list. How fond you are of talking!"

"I am," said Dolly frankly, "I love the sound of my own voice."

"And you don't care who it is you are talking to, nor what you are talking about," said Claire, smiling.

"Really I don't think I do much," Dolly admitted. "I'd rather talk to a dead donkey than not talk at all."

There was no fear of the two girls being dull—a double antidote to dullness was fast approaching.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

THERE was no strict rule laid down as to the hours of visiting at The Friars ; people dropped in promiscuously at all hours, sometimes in the early morning, sometimes in the early evening. The sudden breaking up of the tennis party the day before brought a host of inquiring friends ; the bell seemed to be ringing all day ; but no visitors were admitted. The unexpected arrival of Mr. Watson, and departure of Mrs. Blaine and Ruth, kept everybody fully employed. When that excitement was over, and Madame Colombe had been duly communicated with, the girls thought they would take a stroll and see the sunset from the top of Ongar Hill. As they crossed the lawn they met Mr. Kent, accompanied by another gentleman, coming towards the house. Mr. Kent's face beamed with even extra brightness as he bustled forward to shake hands and proudly present his brother Algernon.

"Only arrived an hour ago!" he exclaimed in an audible whisper to Dolly, blinking both eyes mysteriously ; "was so anxious to see—everybody, you know! was in such a hurry, he would hardly stop to brush the dust off his clothes."

Who was the "everybody" that Algernon Kent was so anxious to see would have been evident to the eyes of a stone image. Claire's face flushed with sudden gladness as their eyes met, and their hands met too in a close warm clasp. The girls turned and walked back with their visitors, re-entered the house, and went into the library.

"I am sorry that everybody isn't here to welcome you," said Dolly demurely, for she had a very strong idea that Ruth composed the "everybody" in Mr. Kent's eyes. "Mamma and Ruth have gone to Knaresborough."

"To Knaresborough!" echoed Mr. Kent, for the moment quite taken aback. "Ah! yes, about that melancholy bit of business, of course—I quite understand," and he elongated his fat, jolly face and looked ludicrously sympathetic. "I—that is, we, mother and I—were very sorry to hear about it. I hope it was nothing very particular—I mean no very near relation—nothing to break your hearts about, you know."

"Not exactly," replied Dorothy, "it was only a great-uncle

whom we very seldom saw ; but it is always sad for anybody to die."

"Ah! yes, of course ; but, then, you know, we've all got to do it some day ; so that's all right—we must remember 'all flesh is grass!'" This agricultural simile seeming most appropriate to the occasion, he paused a moment to allow it to produce a fitting impression, then added, "Suppose they are coming back soon—Miss Levison and your mother, I mean?"

"I hope so," said Dorothy, "it will be awfully dull getting along here without them."

"We must come and brighten you up a bit. Algy will be delighted—so unexpected his coming, but he'll only be here for a few days. I dare say he's telling Miss Claire all about it. Such a stroke of luck for a young fellow! We want to make things pleasant for him ; and mother will be delighted if you'll both come and spend a day up at the house. Can you? will to-morrow suit you?"

"You hear, Claire," exclaimed Dorothy rather irritably, for she did not care to have the whole burden of conversation with Mr. Kent left upon her shoulders, and Claire and Algernon were having a *titte-à-tit* all to themselves. "Mrs. Kent invites us to spend the day with her to-morrow."

"Mrs. Kent is very kind," replied Claire, "but don't you think, Dolly dear, that under present circumstances we had better stay at home?"

It was fortunate that Dolly agreed, for Mr. Kent, in his desire to be agreeable, had hurried himself into a purely fictitious assurance on his mother's behalf. No one would have been more amazed than Mrs. Kent if the two girls had availed themselves of this impromptu invitation, which, coming as it did, it is not likely they would under any circumstances have accepted. But Mr. Kent was ignorant of social ethics, and thought his invitation was quite as good as his mother's.

The quartette sat chatting for some time, and then nominally went for a stroll in the garden, but they extended their ramble beyond it, and wandered into the open country beyond, where they could walk and talk, or not talk, as they pleased. They split into pairs. Algernon and Claire managed, as they generally did, to pair together, and the two couples lost and found one another more than once during their evening ramble.

That Algernon Kent and Claire Thurlowe were drawn together by some strong affinity was generally suspected even beyond their own household, though nobody knew the exact state of affairs ; perhaps nobody but the young people themselves could have enlightened them. Mrs. Blaine quiescently permitted the attentions of Algernon Kent to her niece Claire, and smiled well-pleased on the advances which she believed his elder brother was making to her own daughter Dorothy. Mr. Kent *was* attentive to Dorothy ; there was no denying that ; though she was not the rose, she was near the rose ; and Dorothy received his vicarious and somewhat awkward attentions with some amusement. She knew her mother was under a misapprehension altogether, but made no attempt to set her right ; she had views of her own to which, at the present time, she did not wish to call attention, so allowed her mother to wander unmolested through her Fool's Paradise, well knowing she must be roused from her dream of delight soon.

Meanwhile Mrs. Blaine was supremely content. She never for a moment imagined that Ruth's more mature and stately beauty could weigh in the balance against her darling Dorothy's fresh young loveliness. She had rested for some months past content with the idea that she had the prospect of settling her two portionless girls satisfactorily from a worldly point of view. She never imagined that Dolly would fail to see with her eyes. Mrs. Blaine took no stock whatever in the love-market. It was all very well to play at love-making ; girls would so amuse themselves—perhaps it was natural they should ; but when the reality came in the shape of solid settlements and serious matrimonial arrangements, then romance and sentimentality must be trodden under foot. All sensible well-bred girls would take her view, and prefer the substance to the shadow, regarding love as an ephemeral fleeting passion, that like the butterfly lives its little hour and passes away, whereas wealth, good solid wealth—with all its concomitant advantages—stays, always the most welcome guest at life's varied feast. Wealth feeds and clothes and keeps love warm and comfortable ; poverty pinches and sends it hungrily grovelling to pick up crumbs, till it grows lean and shrivels up and dies from sheer starvation.

Mrs. Blaine took a purely business view of most matters ; she submitted most things to the crucial test of expediency—what

was expedient must surely be done ; therefore of any little wandering fires of flirtations she took no notice ; they would be quickly extinguished when the right time came. Meanwhile, on this, as on most other subjects, the girls held their own opinions, and waited till the tug of war should come.

The sudden change in Claire's fortune (of which she herself was at present unconscious, for she had never been led to think of or dwell upon family matters) might have some influence upon her prospects, for though Algernon Kent was a very good match for a portionless girl, when the daughter of Sir Harold Thurlowe, of Knaresborough, was concerned it was a different matter. It never came into Mrs. Blaine's calculation that men of the Kent stamp are great sticklers for honesty and honour ; they have their own sturdy pride, and like a clean record, and would regard a law-breaker or criminal of high degree with less favour than an honest mender of pots and pans. Besides, to put things quite plainly, the daughter of a returned convict, rich man and baronet though he might be, would not occupy in the world's eyes the proud position she did in those of her loving relations, as she would do were she the daughter of a man "*sans peur et sans reproche*."

As they, the family circle, had buried that shameful past, and hidden it away from her it most concerned, they thought it had passed out of the world's memory as out of the world's sight. Overwhelmed with grief when the misfortune first fell upon them, the elder ladies had withdrawn from society ; but as the girls grew up, they had changed their residence, formed new acquaintances who knew nothing of the sad family history, drawn together round them a pleasant circle of chiefly young people, and gradually grown into a happy confidence that the melancholy history of Harold's disgrace was unknown or forgotten. No one now ever made any inquiry after, or seemed aware of, the existence of the son and brother—he had gone down into the dark waters ; but, let him once lift his head, and attempt to take his original place among men, and those who now seemed to forget would remember, and resurrect the old sin in all its vigorous life. The world never really forgets, though in the hurrying crowd of passing events it may appear to do so for a time ; but the day comes when its memory stirs with fatal remembrances, and the old wounds of the wrong-doer are forced to burst and bleed anew.

The "sins of the father shall be visited on the children," says

the Scripture, and this (to our short-seeing eyes) most cruel law has been rigorously carried out from generation to generations.

Mrs. Blaine considered all things according to her fashion, and determined not to stir or in any way interfere in Claire's doings, unless her father should either give the reins entirely into *her* hands, or return and take them in his own.

Algernon Kent was a far likelier man to take a girl's fancy than his brother, and was indeed his opposite in every particular. He had derived the full benefit of his brother's wealth ; for Reginald Kent was so conscious of his own deficiencies of education, that he determined that his younger brother should labour under no such disadvantages. He sent him to one of the best public schools ; he had wished him to be educated for the Church, or, at least, to enter one of the learned professions, but Algernon's inclination did not point in that direction ; he had a taste, more than a taste, a positive genius, for mechanics, and by his earnest desire was articled in due time to an engineering firm of some eminence. He had devoted himself so devoutly to his profession, and made such rapid progress therein, that now he occupied a position of trust and responsibility, and had a promising career before him.

The two brothers might have descended from different families, so unlike were they both in appearance and temperament ; Algernon was tall, slight, and dark, with more refined features than his brother's, and manners more polished though quite as genial. He had a musical resonant voice, which, however, never rose to that hilarious mirth in which Reginald so often indulged ; in fact, he had the manner and appearance of a man of culture and education—the manner which is not learned in schools or borrowed from books, but is absorbed from the associations of daily life, as a flower absorbs the sunlight, without effort or design ; yet with all his professional devotion he had never neglected masculine accomplishments, and could ride, row, and shoot as well as most men, better than many. He was as strong and agile as he was genuinely attractive in other ways, and so it came to pass when he and Claire first met during the last summer season, they had fallen in love with one another ; for her there was no goodlier man, for him no sweeter, lovelier specimen of womankind ; they had not yet openly acknowledged their mutual affections, but each instinctively knew the feeling of the other—for there is

something in the atmosphere of mutual unuttered love that subtly possesses the whole soul and body long before it resolves itself into words. The time had come now when Algernon felt he *must* speak; he wanted more than vague hopes and restless longings to build his future life upon, and he had come down this bright summer day to tell her so.

One woman will generally help another in a love affair—and though Claire had never confided in Dolly, and shrank with true feminine delicacy from any admission of a love which might be thrown on barren ground, and which, so far as spoken words were concerned, was unsought, yet Dolly *knew*, as plainly as though Claire's heart had been reflected in a looking-glass, and contrived to lose the other couple effectually at last, so that while she and Reginald went home through the lanes, Algernon and Claire were sauntering slowly through the shady wood. Dolly's good nature in submitting to be bored by Mr. Kent for a time, in order that Algernon and Claire might enjoy an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*, was no fruitless self-sacrifice. Algernon availed himself of the opportunity, and the old story was told over again, the love-draught quaffed by two thirsty souls, as they wandered through the soft mysterious woods; the twilight shadows grew and wrapt them round with ghostly greyness; still they lingered.

"We must turn back now," whispered Claire reluctantly, "they will wonder what has become of us."

"Let them wonder," he answered, with supreme contempt for all commonplace things. To return to lamp-light and cake and wine in the drawing-room, and conventional chit-chat with Reginald and Dolly, after this brief indulgence in supreme bliss, seemed too commonplace to be faced at present. He slipped his arm round her waist and drew her closer to him, till her fair curly head almost rested on his shoulder. "Darling Claire," he added, with a little caressing accompaniment, "you don't know how I have thought, how I have longed for this hour to come! You must have known how I loved *you* all along—but I have tortured myself wondering if you would ever give me a little bit of love in return—sometimes I thought yes—then I doubted."

"Now you are satisfied," she whispered softly.

"Well, I can't say that," he answered, "I shall not be really satisfied till I have you for my own—my very own, Claire."

"I am your own now—at least, I shall never be anybody else's."

"Aye, but knowing a thing is yours, and *having* it, is a very different matter. I may have a mansion in the skies, but it is not really mine till I take possession—you understand that, my little girl. I want you for my own little wife, darling."

"Oh!" exclaimed Claire, with a startled expression, "how can you think of such a thing, so soon?"

"I have been thinking of it for the last six months," he answered.

"Why! half an hour ago we were not even engaged—and I don't believe we're engaged now! you've never really asked me."

"That doesn't in the least matter; we might have been engaged six months ago if I'd known—so, reckoning on a commercial scale, we've lost just six months of our lives—and we've got to make that up, and I think we ought to begin doing it as soon as we can. Let me see. It is now the 27th of June; on the 30th of August I start for Austria."

"For Austria!" echoed the amazed Claire.

"Did not I tell you? Of course, though, I forgot; we have had no time to talk of business yet. Well, darling, here's the fact. I've got to engineer and superintend the making of a new railway in the furthestmost corner of Austria—it is a great professional advance for me, and all things look bright ahead. You won't let me go alone, Claire, will you? It would be too cruel *now*! There's plenty of time; I'll speak to Mrs. Blaine directly she comes home, or, bless me! there's your grandmother—I forgot her, she so seldom shows. Why, we may be married and off before the world has time to open its lazy old eyes and wink after us." Claire was bewildered by his rapid sketch, the way he seemed to pull invisible wires and shift the scene from the heights of love to the plains of matrimony. He positively took away her breath!

"But all this is impossible!" she exclaimed, "I couldn't, indeed I couldn't, Algernon; I have never thought of marrying any man yet!"

"I am glad of that," he answered heartily; "but it is time now that you thought of marrying *me*! and think hard and fast, my Claire; when you are going to a place it is no use loitering by the way. You remember the bashful man who was too shy to propose to the lady? so he invited her to go for a walk, and took her past a church. 'Why, there's a church!' said he, very much surprised; they went in; 'And there's a parson, and here's a ring;

let us get married.' Now, that would exactly suit me. I don't know how I shall be able to leave you for a day! I should like to carry you off bodily this very minute, and get married without any of that idiotic fuss about bridesmaids, orange-blossoms, and iced cake; it was all very well in barbarous times, when men got their wives by club law, and decorated them like lambs for the sacrificial altar; but in these civilized days, the binding of two lives together is too serious a matter to be inaugurated with frivolity and flowers. If you only reflect for a moment, I am sure you will agree with me."

Claire hesitated: she would like to agree with him, but in this she really could not. He was carelessly sweeping away all the traditions of her life! What would a wedding be without the accessories he so despised? and which to her had always seemed as important a part of the ceremony as the bridegroom's self. She ventured to insinuate that she should not feel like being married at all without these condemned blossoms and bridesmaids; upon which he, coward-like, thrust his own convictions aside, and promised she should have a cart-load of orange-blossoms and a church full of bridesmaids if she liked; *he* should be oblivious, shut his eyes and see nothing—"nothing but her face." Then they dipped again into a sea of lovers' talk, and when they came up again it was quite dark; they were within sight of The Friars, and they began to be commonplace and sensible again.

"Doesn't it seem strange?" he whispered fondly; "when we left the house such a short time ago, we were two separate, distinct souls! now we belong to one another! So much has happened, it seems as though yesterday was ages ago! I feel as though I had only lived since I have known that you love me, dearest. No, don't go in yet—we have so little time to be together; I must hurry back to look after this Austrian business—there's such a fight for every stroke of luck; a great many men would give their ears to stand in my place."

"Let them!" exclaimed Claire eagerly. "Why should you go to Austria at all? Are you obliged? Surely your brother, who is a rich man——"

"Aye, and a generous one too," answered Algernon warmly; "he has given me a good education and a good start in life; for so much I am indebted to him, but in future I must be indebted

only to myself—every man who is worth his salt should make his own way in the world independently of any other man ; that is what I mean to do, and show Regy that all his brotherly love and care has not been thrown away. He thinks a great deal of my talent, and looks forward to my making myself a place in the world—and I mean to do it. You will help me, dearest, and I shall be doubly strong, doubly energetic, for your sake. Together 'we'll take the field of life, and march to victory.' Some poet says that, I forget which, but we'll reduce it to plain prose, eh, my Claire?"

"I don't know," answered Claire dreamily, "it is all so sudden. I—I don't think I ought to let myself be engaged to you at all until auntie and my father know about it."

"Your father!" echoed Algernon, stopping short, "why, you haven't got a father, have you? it's a joke!"

"Why shouldn't I have a father?" she exclaimed quickly.

"Because nobody has ever seen him, or ever heard of him, dear," returned Algernon, "and, naturally, everybody thinks you are an orphan."

"Thank God! I'm not," she answered fervently; then she added more reflectively, "I daresay it does seem strange—you see, he left England when I was quite a little thing. I believe he was so distracted with grief at my dear mother's death, that he rushed away, and has never come back. He has been travelling about in all sorts of strange countries; I believe he is somewhere in California now."

"Of course he writes to you?" said Algernon, rather puzzled.

"Well, not to me, but to auntie, and that only once a year; she gives me messages from him—and that is the one thing in the world that troubles me; they won't talk to me about him; I think they are angry at his staying away so long—it is strange, isn't it?"

Algernon admitted that it did look rather strange, adding,

"Though, perhaps, if you knew all the circumstances, it might not seem strange at all. When a man is travelling through strange scenes, and mixing with strange people, he finds so much to interest and excite him, that in the fulness of the new life he is apt to forget the old; and then the time passes so quickly; he may always be thinking of returning home, and putting

off, and putting off the coming till the best part of his life lies behind him."

It was quite dark when they forced themselves to return to The Friars, where they found the hypocritical Dolly anxiously waiting their return, quite apologetic for having lost them, and Grannie ready to administer a scolding all round. "They ought not to have gone out at all under the circumstances, especially without her leave; now that her daughter was away she was responsible for everything, temporarily at least the head of the house; they had given a great shock to the proprieties, too, wandering about in masculine company till that late hour of the evening, &c." It was not often the taciturn grandmamma made such a long speech.

Algernon hurled himself into the breach, and took all the blame upon himself. He was accustomed to make himself pleasant to young and old, and now smoothed the old lady's ruffled plumes so effectually that a grim smile parted her lips as he, with effusive cordiality, shook hands and said, "Good night." The girls, meanwhile, glad to escape, slipped out of the room to avoid a renewal of Grannie's righteous wrath.

She looked after the young fellow with a reflective, puzzled face, the thin lips tightly closed, the drawn brows contracting into extra wrinkles as she muttered to herself half aloud :

"He, is like—strangely like—to Reginald! To-night, as he is lying in his coffin, the years seem to have rolled back, and I see him now, as I saw him then—this boy's face has brought him back to me." And she sat pondering upon the dead man's early sins—lost, utterly lost to the present—thinking only of the past, face to face in her reverie once more with the living and the dead.

(To be continued.)

3 Wonder !

I STOOD afar and looked at Love,
And marked the gladness of his air.
The rain falls coldly from above.
I wonder why he seemed so fair !

Then drew he near and took my hand,
And at his touch I sighed amain.
The summer sun delights the land.
I wonder why Love seemed like pain !

" My rose-wreath hurts : who wears it, weeps,"
Love whispered, and our lips did meet.
The trembling dawn to mid-day creeps.
I wonder why the pain seemed sweet !

FAYR MADOC.